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THE TWO MR. WETHERBYS

A Middle-Class Comedy in Three Acts

BY

ST. JOHN HANKIN

"Life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel."

HORACE WALPOLE.

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THE TWO MR. WETHERBYS.

Scenes.

ACT I. The Drawing-room at the James Wetherby's.
ACT II. The Dining-room at the James Wetherby's.
ACT III. Same as Act I.

The curtain is dropped for a moment half-way through Act II to represent the lapse of three hours.

Characters.

RICHARD WETHERBY..	The bad Mr. Wetherby, living in a bachelor flat in London.
CONSTANTIA.....	Margaret's sister, married to Richard but separated from him.
JAMES WETHERBY....	The good Mr. Wetherby, living en famille at Norwood.
MARGARET.....	His wife.
AUNT CLARA.....	Aunt to Margaret and Constantia, a pious old lady of 65.
ROBERT CARNE.....	Her nephew, a solemn prig with no digestion.
MAID.....	At the James Wetherbys'.

SCENE:—Mr. James Wetherby's house at Norwood. The action of the play takes some 20 hours, from the afternoon of one day to the forenoon of the next.

Cast of the Original production before the Stage Society at the Imperial Theatre, London, on March 15, 1903.

RICHARD WETHERBY..	Mr. Nye Chart.
CONSTANTIA.....	Miss Nancy Price.
JAMES WETHERBY.....	Mr. A. E. George.
MARGARET..... ...	Miss Ellen O'Malley.
AUNT CLARA..... ..	Miss Henrietta Cowen.
ROBERT CARNE.....	Mr. Dennis Eadie.

(The play produced by Mr. CHARLES ROCK.)

Properties.

ACT I.

Knitting.
Ball of wool.
Work basket.
Walking-stick. } For Aunt Clara.

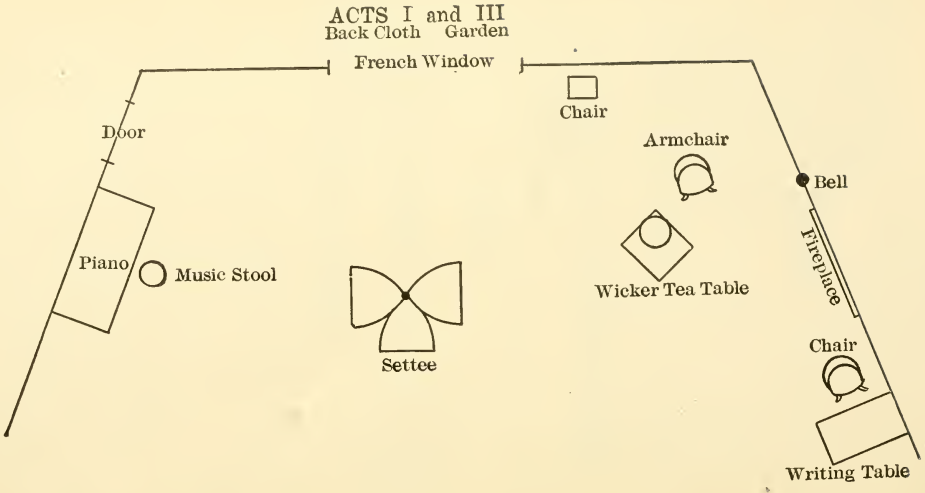
Newspaper.
Tea cloth.
Tea things for four.
Plate of thin bread and butter.
Plate of biscuits.
Cake.
Cheque book in drawer of writing-table.
Pen, ink and blotter on writing-table.
Printed appeal for a charity (Robert.)
Largish lacquered Japanese tray.
Conspicuous photograph of James in frame.
Small brass clock on mantelpiece.
Silver framed calendar on writing-table.
A few other knick-knacks which Margaret will collect as souvenirs in Act III.

ACT II.

Table cloth.
Dinner things for three.
Dessert things for three.
Spare dinner things on sideboard.
Coffee cups for three; sugar, milk.
Small tray for serving coffee.
Large tray for clearing table.
Tray for whisky and soda.
Crumb scoop and salver.
Tantalus or decanter for whisky.
Syphon.
Three or four tumblers.
Cigar case containing cigars and cigarettes (Dick).
"Empire" programme.
Smoking jacket (for James).

ACT III.

Japanese tea-tray.
Photograph of James in frame.
Small brass clock
Silver framed calendar.
Knick-knacks for Margaret to collect.


ACTS I and III
Back Cloth Garden
French Window
Chair
Door
Armchair
Bell
Piano
Music Stool
Fireplace
Wicker Tea Table
Settee
Chair
Writing Table

THE TWO MR. WETHERBYS.

ACT I.

SCENE.—The JAMES WETHERBYS' *drawing-room at Norwood. A door* R. *leads to Hall. French windows at back, closed, give on to surburban garden. Fireplace* L., *writing-table with chair down* L. *facing audience. Circular settee to seat three, one with back to audience, the other two facing* L. C. *and* R. C., *occupies centre of stage. General furnishing of room philistine but not shabby. A profusion of plush photograph frames on mantelpiece and on upright piano which stands against wall* R. *One of the most conspicuous frames on mantelpiece contains photograph of* JAMES WETHERBY.

(*When Curtain rises* AUNT CLARA, *an old lady of sixty-five, is discovered in armchair making a crochet shawl.* JAMES *is sitting near her on settee* C. *reading a newspaper aloud*)

JAMES. (*in bored voice*) "It is, however, abundantly clear that the Government possesses

NOTE. The Stage Directions throughout this play are given from the standpoint of the audience, R. meaning the Audience's Right, L. the Audience's Left.

the confidence of the country and that unless some unforeseen difficulty arises, the present administration will remain in power at least until the autumn—" (*yawns slightly*) I beg your pardon, Aunt Clara. "Meantime it is for the Prime Minister and his colleagues to take measures to prevent any diminution in that confidence, and to see to it that when the Next General Election takes place, the Conservative party are not merely returned to Power, but returned with an even larger majority. Only in this way can the enemies of this country be convinced that her destiny is in strong and capable hands, and be restrained from embarking in enterprises hurtful to her interests or damaging to her prestige." (*yawns*) "To hand over the task of forming a Government to the disunited factions of the Opposition would be——"

Aunt Clara. (*in hard clear tone*) Will you kindly pick up my wool, James? It has rolled under the settee.

James. Certainly, Aunt Clara. (*grovels for it, and after disentangling it from various chair legs, etc., returns with it triumphant, but flushed with exertion*) Here it is. (*Places it on table beside her*)

(*She replaces it on her lap where it is obvious that it will once more fall in a minute or two*)

Now where was I? Ah, here we are. (*Resuming bored voice*) "It is however abundantly clear that the Government possesses the confidence of the country—

(AUNT CLARA'S *ball again seeks the floor*)

and that unless some unforeseen difficulty arises the present administration will remain in power, etc." (*reads on as before*)

AUNT CLARA. (*feeling for wool*) There! It's gone again!

JAMES. (*bored*) Where is it *now*, Aunt?

AUNT CLARA. On the floor. I had it on my lap a moment ago. It must have rolled under that chair. Will you give it me, please?

(JAMES *puts down paper with the least possible suggestion of irritation and recommences grovelling. Finally again emerges successful and places it on table*)

(*replacing it on lap*) Thank you, James.

JAMES. (*eyeing the manœuvre with strong disfavor*) Wouldn't it be better to leave it on the table? Then it wouldn't be so likely to slip off.

AUNT CLARA. (*placidly*) No, I'm used to having it on my lap.

JAMES. Very well, Aunt. Shall I go on? (*picks up paper again*) "It is however abundantly clear that the Government possesses the confidence of the country and that unless some unforeseen difficulty arises—etc." (*yawns again*)

AUNT CLARA. (*in her hard clear tones*) Haven't you read that part before?

JAMES. It does sound rather familiar.

AUNT CLARA. (*severely*) I'm afraid you're not reading with much attention, James.

JAMES. I suppose not, I'm rather tired. (*smothers another yawn*)

AUNT CLARA. (*offended*) Perhaps we had better put aside our reading for this afternoon, then.

JAMES. (*putting down paper with sigh of relief and rising*) Very well, Aunt. (*strolls towards garden* C. *up* R. *to* C.)

AUNT CLARA. (*quite unconscious of this manœuvre*) We might talk a little instead. After luncheon when I'm not being read to, I like to converse for a few minutes. It prevents me from going to sleep.

JAMES. (*to her, turning back from garden*) You're sure you wouldn't *rather* go to sleep?

AUNT CLARA. No, James. I do not approve of this modern habit of sleeping during the day.

(JAMES *sighs dismally and goes to fire where he stands with back to mantelpiece looking profoundly bored*)

(*putting down crochet, etc., on table*) Has Constantia come yet?

JAMES. No, she won't be here much before tea, I expect.

AUNT CLARA. And Richard?

JAMES. Dick comes about the same time.

AUNT CLARA. (*reproachfully*) I cannot think how you could have asked Richard to stay here! After the way he treated Constantia!

JAMES. (*casually*) Oh, Dick's not a bad fellow. He didn't get on with Constantia, of course, but he's got his good points all the same.

AUNT CLARA. (*severely*) I have never been able to find them. His treatment of your sister-in-law was shameful. I am sure with *your* high principles you would be the last to defend it.

JAMES. (*hastily*) Of course, of course. Still one mustn't judge too harshly.

AUNT CLARA. I hope I do not, James. Indeed it would be hard to do so in *this* case.

JAMES. (*bored*) He's only coming for one night. And after all he is my brother.

AUNT CLARA. *That* scarcely seems to me to be in his favour. You are too forgiving, James. Personally I don't approve of this modern habit of forgiving people. It encourages them. And to invite him here! What *will* Constantia think?

JAMES. I did it partly to oblige Constantia. When the separation between her and my brother was decided on, it was arranged that the two parties should meet once a year. It was thought that this might open the way to a reconciliation later. When the date for the meeting approached, the question immediately arose where should it take place? Constantia wished it to be at her house here in Norwood. Dick declined this, and suggested his flat in Maddox Street. Each of them, in fact, wanted it to take place on his own ground. To put an end to all discussion I suggested that it should be here. And here it is to be. (*smothers another yawn*)

AUNT CLARA. Ah, James, you are always thoughtful for others! If only your brother had been like you! But he has *no* heart.

JAMES. Dick's all right. He's been a little wild, but he'll settle down. (*looks at watch*) I suppose he'll be here about half-past four. (*crosses* R. *to* C.)

AUNT CLARA. Robert will arrive rather earlier.

JAMES. (*endeavouring to conceal his disgust*) Robert! Why, he was here to luncheon.

AUNT CLARA. Yes, but he is coming back to tea. In Constantia's interest he thought as many of her relatives as possible should be present during the interview—to support her.

JAMES. (*grimly*) I don't think *Robert* would be much support.

AUNT CLARA. You never can tell. A man of his high principles!

JAMES. (*impatiently*) Oh, his *principles* are all right.

AUNT CLARA. I am sure *you* do not undervalue such things.

JAMES. (*hastily*) My dear Aunt Clara, certainly not. Still Robert is not exactly a *strong* man, is he?—except in principles, I mean. (*crosses to* L. C. *above table*)

AUNT CLARA. My poor nephew certainly enjoys wretched health.

JAMES. I wonder whether he has enough to do? (*at back of table* L. C.)

AUNT CLARA. (*complacently*) Robert has *plenty* of occupation. He comes to see me every day!

JAMES. Yes, he's generally here, I notice.

AUNT CLARA. You are so hospitable. And Robert is devoted to his relations. That shows such a nice nature.

JAMES. (*bored*) No doubt.

AUNT CLARA. (*enthusiastically*) And then he does so much good. Always busy about collecting subscriptions for some deserving object. I

call that such a *useful* life. His means, poor fellow, don't allow of his contributing himself, but he collects quite a large sum from *others*.

JAMES. (*grimly*) Yes, I've noticed that!

AUNT CLARA. I am sure you are grateful to him. He is always pointing out to you institutions where money may be safely bestowed. Ill health, which makes most people selfish, has not been able to spoil *my* nephew.

JAMES. Poor Robert, he is certainly a martyr to indisposition. (*struck by an idea*, R. C. *above sofa*) Do you think, Aunt Clara, that the air of Norwood really agrees with him?

AUNT CLARA. I have not noticed that his health grows any worse.

JAMES. (*eagerly*) Oh yes, it does. He *pines*, Aunt Clara, positively *pines* for a more bracing air. The East coast, for instance!

AUNT CLARA. Ah, James, always considerate. (*complacently*) But Robert will never go anywhere where he cannot constantly come and see me. *That* I am sure of. Indeed it would not be good for him, he has so few distractions.

JAMES. (*depressed*) That's true. (*walks down* R. *and turns, brightening again*) But why shouldn't you go, too, Aunt Clara? I'm sure it can't be a good thing for *you* to remain in one place for so long together. Don't you think a change would do *you* good?

AUNT CLARA. (*virtuously*) I was never a gadabout. And I disapprove of this modern mania for change. Besides with only my little annuity——

JAMES. (*interrupting eagerly*) Yes, yes, I know. (*crosses to* L. *of* AUNT C.) But for Robert's sake? You might take him with you, and of course I should be delighted to contribute—

AUNT CLARA. (*patting his shoulder affectionately*) No, no, James. Your heart is ever generous, but in this case there is really no necessity. The air here suits me excellently, and Robert is quite as well as can be expected. Besides there is Margaret to be thought of. I could not leave *her!*

JAMES. I'll look after Margaret. (*back to fireplace*)

AUNT CLARA. I am sure you would. I know how devoted you are to her. But Margaret likes to have her own family about her.

JAMES. (*ruefully*) So she does. (*crosses to writing-table* L., *sits*)

AUNT CLARA. (*affectionately*) So you mustn't think *any* more about this. It was generous of you to propose it, but I am *quite* contented here. Living in your house, James, with Robert and Constantia coming in *every* day, I have everything that I need for happiness. (*wipes tear from her eye*) Ah, here is Robert.

(*Enter* ROBERT R., *a cadaverous shambling man of five and thirty.*)

ROBERT. (*nods to James*) Good morning, Aunt Clara. (*shakes hands*) You weren't down for lunch.

AUNT CLARA. No, I had a little soup in my room, I had a bad night.

ROBERT. (*sitting on settee* L. C. *gloomily*) Ah, *my* insomnia is chronic.

AUNT CLARA. (*bravely*) But we must not complain. On the whole my health is wonderfully good.

ROBERT. I wish I could say that. After the Otaheite mission meeting last night I felt positively faint.

AUNT CLARA. Did you see James?

ROBERT. No, was he there?

AUNT CLARA. Of course. You know his interest in Otaheite.

JAMES. (*hastily*) Oh, in a large meeting like that it is so easy to miss a face.

ROBERT. (*in a hard voice*) I shouldn't have called it a large meeting.

JAMES. (*hurriedly*) Relatively large! Of course it wasn't *crowded*.

ROBERT. I should think not. Why, there were scarcely a hundred people there.

JAMES. (*judicially*) Indeed? I should have thought more than a *hundred*. (*to* AUNT C., *with rapid change of subject*) Shall I begin to read to you again, Aunt Clara?

AUNT CLARA. Not now, thank you, it is almost time for my walk.

ROBERT. By the way, James, I have here an appeal for a good object which may well claim your support. The Mahommedan Conversion Fund. A most deserving field. (*produces paper from pocket*)

JAMES. (*irritably*) Oh, come, I hardly think

we need go as far as the Mahommedans to find a deserving object.

ROBERT. I don't see that. After all Arabia is nearer than Otahite.

JAMES. (*indifferently*) I dare say.

ROBERT. And as you took the trouble to go to the meeting last night—I can't think how I came to miss you there, by-the-bye, where were you sitting?—I should have thought——

JAMES. (*rising hastily and going over to him* C.) My dear fellow, you're quite right. Converting the Mahommedans is a most useful field. Leave me that paper and I'll look through it. (*takes paper and walks up* R.)

(*Enter* MARGARET R. U. E. *with* AUNT CLARA'S *bonnet and shawl.*)

Hullo, Maggie. Been lying down? (*kisses her.*)

MARGARET. For half an hour. (*to* AUNT C.) The sun is shining brightly now, Aunt Clara. Hadn't you better have your walk? (*behind table*)

AUNT CLARA. I hardly feel up to it.

JAMES. (*going to her* L. *of her chair*) Oh yes, I really think you should, just a turn or two in the garden. (*helps her to rise*)

AUNT CLARA. Very well, perhaps a few steps. (*is helped into bonnet and shawl*) And which of my dear nephews shall escort me? (*beaming*) James, I think.

JAMES (*hastily*) No, no, Aunt. Robert shall go with you while I look through this Mahommedan Appeal.

AUNT CLARA (*much touched at this fresh evidence of self denial*) Ah, James, always willing to deny yourself. Come, Robert.

ROBERT. (*rising heavily*) Very well. Perhaps a gentle walk will do me good.

(*Exit* AUNT CLARA *to garden supported by* ROBERT.)

(MARGARET *escorts both as far as window.* JAMES *with a sigh of relief goes to writing-table* L. *with Mahommedan Appeal, eyes it with strong disfavour, glances at a page or two, then with a wry face takes out cheque book and writes cheque.* MARGARET *returning from window goes to him, and noticing his depression, lays hand on shoulder.*)

MARGARET. Tired, dear? (*behind* JAMES)

JAMES. A little.

(*There is a pause, during which* MARGARET *pats* JAMES *affectionately on shoulder while he fidgets with paper knife, etc.*)

JAMES (*diffidently*) Don't you think, Maggie, that Aunt Clara might *sometimes* go and stay with someone else?

MARGARET. (*puzzled*) Whom can she stay with?

JAMES. (*hopelessly*) That's just it, whom indeed!

MARGARET. You see she *has* no one except us —and Constantia.

JAMES. That wouldn't be much change for her! Constantia's always here anyhow.

MARGARET. (*gently*) Not much change certainly.

(*There is another perceptible pause.*)

JAMES. (*with an effort*) Well then, Robert? Don't you think he might come *rather* less frequently?

MARGARET. My dear! He only comes to luncheon occasionally.

JAMES. Half a dozen times a week.

MARGARET. No, no, James, only three or four.

JAMES. Is that all? It seems oftener!

MARGARET. (*kneels by him, fondling his hair*) What's the matter with you, dear? You seem out of spirits.

JAMES. (*taking her hand and pressing it*) It's nothing. Only we never seem to get any time to ourselves, do we?

MARGARET. Not very much, perhaps.

JAMES. And it would certainly be more comfortable if we did, eh, little girl? (*looking up at her face*)

MARGARET. (*gently*) But we mustn't think only of *comfort*, must we?

JAMES. What an angel you are! (*takes her hand and kisses it*)

(*Enter Servant* R. U. E.)

SERVANT. Mrs. Richard Wetherby.

JAMES. Confound!

(*Enter* CONSTANTIA, *an imposing figure, handsomely dressed in black, rather as if she had*

gone into half mourning to mark her sense of her separation from her husband.)

MARGARET. (*putting hand over his mouth*) Hush! (*rises to greet her sister*) Good afternoon, Connie. (*kisses her*)

(*They meet* R. C. CONSTANTIA *crosses* L. C. *after kissing* MARGARET.)

JAMES. (*rising*) How are you? (*shakes hands.*)

CONSTANTIA. (*in her elaborate manner*) Thank you, James, I am tolerably well. Has Richard arrived yet?

JAMES. Not yet.

CONSTANTIA. I am glad of that. I would rather be here to receive him. I shall feel more *at home.*

(JAMES *makes a face, which* MARGARET *observes, and turns up* R. C. *to garden window.*)

MARGARET. Aunt Clara is in the garden.

JAMES. (*hurriedly*) Yes. She has just gone out with Robert. (*insinuatingly*) Oughtn't you to go and say "How do you do" to her?

CONSTANTIA. Very well. Perhaps I had better do so. I shall not be long. (*going up* L. C.)

JAMES. (*as soon as she is out of the room*) Pray don't hurry.

(*Exit* CONSTANTIA C. *to garden.*)

(*There is a third significant pause during which* MARGARET *crosses down* R. *and sits* C. JAMES

crosses to settee c., repossesses himself of his wife's hand, and sits down by her quietly.)

(*Reflectively*) I suppose it wouldn't be possible to get Constantia to *move*, would it?

MARGARET. Move?

JAMES. Yes, go away from Norwood altogether.

MARGARET. Oh no, she likes being near *us*.

JAMES (*gloomily*) I was afraid so.

MARGARET. (*kissing him*) How silly you are this afternoon. I've never seen you like this before. Why shouldn't Connie live near us?

JAMES. (*petulantly*) Why *should* she? Why doesn't she go and live with her husband like other women?

MARGARET. With Richard? But you know her principles.

JAMES. (*bored*) Here's another of them.

MARGARET. (*not understanding*) What dear?

JAMES. (*recovering himself*) Nothing. Only I seem to have heard rather a lot about principles to-day.

MARGARET. As a member of the married woman's Protection League, Constantia naturally has a high ideal of a husband's duty to his wife. A very high ideal. So has Aunt Clara. So has Robert.

JAMES. They're a remarkably unanimous family.

MARGARET. Constantia would have considered it *wrong* to condone Richard's infidelity.

JAMES. There was no proof that Dick was unfaithful.

MARGARET. What other explanation could there be of his late hours, his constant absences from home?

JAMES. Was he ever asked to explain them?

MARGARET. Of course. Constantia *never* allowed Richard to be out after midnight without demanding an explanation. She felt it to be her duty.

JAMES. What did Dick say?

MARGARET. He *laughed* at her.

(JAMES *shows a tendency to laugh also*)

Jim! I believe you're laughing too!

JAMES. Well, the interviews must have been rather comic. Constantia proclaiming the rights of women and the wickedness of husbands, and old Dick grinning away on the hearthrug. (*begins to laugh again*)

MARGARET. (*shocked*) Oh, Jim! I never thought you would make a joke of such a thing.

JAMES. (*pulling himself up*) No! No! Dick didn't behave at all well. Still I think Constantia might have managed him better.

MARGARET. Constantia never attempted to *manage* her husband. She had too much sense of her own dignity. She merely insisted upon her rights.

JAMES. Rather a maddening attitude that?

MARGARET. Richard was in fault.

JAMES. Perhaps there were faults on Constantia's side as well?

MARGARET. (*pained*) Oh, Jim, I thought you never judged people harshly.

JAMES. No, no, dear. You misunderstand me. I only mean that perhaps Constantia did not show Dick much affection? She's not what you would call a demonstrative woman.

MARGARET. (*gently*) I don't think she ever failed in her duty.

JAMES. A woman must do a lot more than her duty if she's to make her husband happy.

MARGARET. Richard did not make her happy either, you know.

JAMES. That's it, you see! They're quits.

MARGARET. (*affectionately*) Its like you, dear, to try and defend Richard. You always make the best of everybody. Still he was greatly to blame.

JAMES. I'm afraid he was.

(*Slight pause.*)

But you won't do anything to prevent a reconciliation, will you?

MARGARET. No. But you mustn't ask me to encourage it.

JAMES. (*rises, goes* L. C.) Well, let's hope they'll patch it up between them, to-day. She's not seen Dick for a year. And she must have been fond of him once.

MARGARET. What does Robert think?

JAMES. (*hastily*) Oh, I don't think we need consult Robert.

MARGARET. By the way, Robert and I are going to the great meeting at Lambeth to-night in aid of the Bishop's Sustentation Fund. We shall dine in town. You don't mind?

JAMES. What about Dick? He'll be here.

MARGARET. It is because of Richard that I am going. I was afraid it might seem rather marked if I were out the only night he's dining here, but what was I to do?

JAMES. (*briefly*) Not go, I suppose.

MARGARET. I couldn't do that. Of course, I don't want to hurt Richard's feelings, but I would rather not sit at table with a man who is living apart from his wife.

JAMES. I should have thought it was no worse to sit at table with a man who is separated from his wife than with a wife who is separated from her husband. Constantia is here often enough!

MARGARET. (*slightly scandalised*) The cases are hardly parallel.

JAMES. I should think they weren't! Considering that your sister is here all day and every day, I think you might manage to meet my brother at dinner once a year.

MARGARET. (*pause, rises*) I'm sorry you're vexed, dear. I hoped you wouldn't mind. (*pause*) However, it doesn't matter. I'll tell Robert I've changed my plans, and he and I will both have dinner with you here before the meeting.

JAMES. (L. C.) Heaven forbid! Robert was here at luncheon. He will be here to tea. I'm hanged if he shall dine here as well.

MARGARET. (C.) Well, dear, what can I do? I can't very well disappoint Robert. It would be unkind.

JAMES. (*remorsefully*) What a brute I am!

(*kisses her*) Of course you mustn't. Dine in town by all means. I'll make your excuses to Dick, and we'll go round to the club after dinner and play billiards. There, dear, I'm sorry I was cross. I suppose I'm out of sorts or something. (*cross to table* L.)

MARGARET. (*crosses to* L. *caressing him*) Poor Jim! You won't mind dining alone with him, will you?

JAMES. Of course not, he won't eat me. Besides I shall have Aunt Clara!

MARGARET. Yes, I was forgetting Aunt Clara.

JAMES. Happy woman! (*sits* L.)

MARGARET. (*laughing*) You're evidently not well at all. I shall send for Dr. Long, and he'll give you some horrid medicine. That Otaheite meeting was over ever so late last night. I expect that tired you.

(*They embrace. Enter by window* CONSTANTIA, AUNT CLARA *and* ROBERT. ROBERT *enters behind* AUNT CLARA, *who leans on* CONSTANTIA'S *left arm. He stands by the window gloomily observing the embrace, then moves down* R. MARGARET *moves the armchair a little* L. CONSTANTIA, *after depositing* AUNT CLARA, *comes down* L. C. *to settee.* MARGARET *goes up to window*)

JAMES. (*ruefully*) Interrupted again! (*rises, and crosses* R. C.)

(CONSTANTIA *seats herself on settee* C. AUNT CLARA *in armchair* L. *The latter resumes her crochet,* ROBERT *moons about.*)

ROBERT. (R. *looking at watch*) Half-past four. Time for tea.

JAMES. (R. C.) Dick will be here directly.

ROBERT. (*unctuously*) I'm afraid this will be a very painful meeting for all of us.

JAMES. That reminds me. I expect, Constantia, you'd rather have your interview with Richard in private? (*to* CONSTANTIA *standing between her and* ROBERT)

ROBERT. (*interrupting*) I hardly think——

JAMES. My dear Robert, will you kindly allow Constantia to decide for herself? (*to* CONSTANTIA) Well?

CONSTANTIA. Thank you, James, I think that will certainly be the best arrangement.

JAMES. Very well, then. (*crosses* L. *below fireplace and stands back to fire—rings bell*) Jane shall show Dick into the library. Margaret and I will go there and give him some tea. You, Aunt Clara and Robert will have tea here. After tea I will bring Dick here and leave you to have your talk with him in private.

(*Enter* JANE.)

When Mr. Richard comes show him into the library, and let me know.

JANE. Very well, sir.

(*Exit.*)

ROBERT. You are sure you would not rather have someone at hand?

CONSTANTIA. Pray do not be ridiculous, Robert. I trust I am able to conduct an inter-

view with my husband without outside assistance.

JAMES. (L.) Of course! And I hope the result will be to bring you together again.

(CONSTANTIA *bows coldly.*)

AUNT CLARA. James!

JAMES. (*hastily*) That is, of course, if you are conscientiously able to forgive him.

ROBERT. (*rises—grunts*) By the way, James, about that Mahommedan Appeal——

JAMES. (*impatiently*) Oh yes, I've looked through it. There's a cheque in my pocket somewhere. (*cross* R. C.) Here it is. (*hands it to him* R.)

ROBERT. (*sitting, after examining the amount*) Thank you, James, I felt sure the good work would find a supporter in you.

JAMES. (R. C.) Yes, yes, of course. Always glad to do what I can. (*cross to* L. C.)

(*Front door is heard.*)

Ah, that must be Dick. Ready, Maggie? (*to* CONSTANTIA) Then you will see Dick alone here in say ten minutes.

(MAID *enters.*)

MAID. Mr. Richard is in the library, sir.

JAMES. Very well. (*moves up* L. C.) Take him some tea and bring some here. Come, Maggie.

(*Exeunt* MARGARET *and* JAMES.)

AUNT CLARA. (*seated by fireplace*) It must

be very painful for dear James to meet his brother in these distressing circumstances. If only Richard were more like him. But the two brothers are *quite* different! (*shakes her head mournfully*)

ROBERT. Richard is by nature incurably frivolous and vicious.

CONSTANTIA. (*calmly*) I do not think anything is to be gained by exaggerating my husband's failings.

(*Enter* JANE *with tea. Moves table a little* L. C. *puts tea on table* L. C. *and brings down chair from up* L. *and puts it behind table.*)

There was always a regrettable levity about his behaviour which showed a tendency to increase with years. And, of course, his moral character is scandalous. (*goes over to tea-table*) But, these defects are not necessarily incurable. Tea, Aunt Clara?

AUNT CLARA. Thank you.

CONSTANTIA. Take this to Aunt Clara, Robert.

(ROBERT *rises heavily from chair, gets tea and crosses* L. *up stage.*)

AUNT CLARA. I am afraid Richard's disposition always lacked the note of seriousness which is so beautiful in James. (*takes tea*)—Thank you, Robert—I remember people used to joke about it. They called Richard "The bad Mr. Wetherby" and James "The good Mr. Wetherby."

(ROBERT *stands by* R. *of armchair*)

CONSTANTIA. I remember. However, our separation will have sobered him, no doubt. (*gives* ROBERT *his tea*)

AUNT CLARA. Let us hope so, my dear.

ROBERT. (*taking bread and butter, and crossing* C.) Have you made up your mind what attitude to adopt towards him? If I might advise I should urge that you receive his advances with the utmost reserve. (*sitting settee* C.)

AUNT CLARA. Yes, Robert is right. Do not allow your heart to betray you into any course which your reason would not approve.

CONSTANTIA. (*calmly helping herself to cake*) I think you may count on me not to err in *that* direction.

AUNT CLARA. I am glad to hear it. Modern wives are far too ready to forgive their husbands. It is the cause of many unhappy homes.

CONSTANTIA. (*calmly*) I did not say I shall *not* forgive Richard.

AUNT CLARA. My dear!

CONSTANTIA. On the contrary. It is my intention to forgive him this afternoon, after he has duly expressed contrition and asked for forgiveness.

AUNT CLARA. But can you be sure that his repentance is sincere?

CONSTANTIA. (*philosophically*) Of course there can be no certainty in these things. But I see every reason why it should be. He must have felt our separation acutely. In the early

days of our marriage Richard was by no means without tenderness.

ROBERT. (*in a hollow voice*) Constantia, is this wise? (*he takes bread and butter*)

CONSTANTIA. I think so. After all, Richard is my husband. And I have not found my position since I decided to live apart from him altogether an agreeable one. Socially indeed it has great inconveniences. (*rises and takes* AUNT CLARA'S *cup and places it on tray—seating herself again*) More tea, Aunt?

AUNT CLARA. (*putting down cup with gesture of dissent*) Well, my dear, of course you must do what your *conscience* tells you to be right.

CONSTANTIA. Exactly. I shall not pardon him too quickly. I shall just yield gradually to his protestations. (*Eats some cake delicately*) After all, a year is a long time and it is better to err on the side of leniency. (*pours herself out more tea*) A year ago, I felt obliged to leave Richard—I could not endure his heartless behaviour. Indeed a wife who condones her husband's irregularities, is wanting in her duty. And at the time I intended never to return to him. But, one must not be vindictive. And the position of a woman who is separated from her husband is not a comfortable one. It has all the disadvantages of widowhood without its compensations. Yes, on the whole I think Richard has been punished long enough. More tea, Robert?

ROBERT. (*rises, and bringing his cup*) I

fear you are leaning unduly towards mercy. (*Pause*) I greatly fear it.

(CONSTANTIA *pours out* ROBERT'S *tea. He takes it and sits again* C. *taking bread and butter.*)

CONSTANTIA. I am willing to take the risk. At least I shall feel that I have done what is right in forgiving my husband. Besides there are practical matters to be considered, the loss of income and so forth. When I left Richard I had to move into a smaller house and make other heavy sacrifices. The allowance he makes me, though sufficient, is considerably smaller than the income I enjoyed as his wife.

AUNT CLARA. I don't think you must allow that to weigh with you. After all what is money?

ROBERT. (*unctuously*) What indeed! (*he takes more bread and butter*)

CONSTANTIA. (*frigidly*) My dear Robert, of course I am above all *sordid* considerations in this matter. I shall do what I consider right in any circumstances. But there is no use in shutting one's eyes to things.

AUNT CLARA. (*dismally*) Well, well, my dear. I trust you will not find you have made a mistake.

CONSTANTIA. (*coldly*) I do not usually make mistakes, I believe. I shall forgive Richard this afternoon after he has expressed his regret in suitable terms. Of course I shall speak to him very seriously and caution him as to his future conduct. But afterwards I shall forgive him.

(*Enter* MARGARET R.)

MARGARET. (*at door*) Richard will come to you now, Connie, if you are ready to see him.

CONSTANTIA. Very well. (*pours herself out some tea*)

MARGARET. (*going to* AUNT CLARA *and helping her to rise*) Come, Aunt Clara. Let me take you to your room. (*to* ROBERT) I think you had better go now, Robert.

ROBERT. Certainly. (*putting cup on chiffonier* R. *and finishing bread and butter*)

(*Exit* ROBERT *sulkily.*)

MARGARET. (*at door*) Jim will bring Richard to you in a minute or two.

(*Exit* R. *with* AUNT CLARA.)

(CONSTANTIA *puts down her cup directly they leave, rises, but hearing voices, sits on settee* C. *There is an appreciable pause. Then enter* R. JAMES *and* DICK. *The latter is a handsome, careless, jovial looking man of five and thirty, very cheerful and quite at his ease.*)

DICK. (*going up to* CONSTANTIA *and shaking hands*) How do you do, Con. Pretty well, I hope?

CONSTANTIA. Thank you. I am quite well.

DICK. (*cheerfully*) That's right.

JAMES. (*at door*) Now I'll leave you two together. You may have things to talk of alone. (*going*)

DICK. Not at all, my dear fellow. Stay by all means. Con and I have no secrets.

JAMES. (*awkwardly*) But I think—(*going again*)

DICK. (*up* C.) Nonsense, Jim. Sit down. What on earth *should* we have to talk about? Don't be absurd.

JAMES. (*still going*) Oh, but—Constantia said she would prefer to speak to you alone.

DICK. Ah, that's different. If Con has anything private to say to me I'm agreeable. I always am. Off with you. I say what time's dinner? (*goes up to* JAMES R.)

JAMES. Seven. By the way, Margaret asks you to excuse her. She has to dine out.

DICK. All right. (*nods cheerily to* JAMES *who goes out* R.) Well, Con, what have you got to say to *me*, eh?

CONSTANTIA. (*with dignity*) Have *you* nothing to say to *me*, Richard?

DICK. (R. C.) I think not. Nothing special.

CONSTANTIA. Then I hardly see the object of this meeting.

DICK. (*cheerily*) Nor do I. But *you* arranged it, you know.

CONSTANTIA. (*stiffly*) Pardon me!

DICK. No? Ah yes, I remember. You suggested every six months. I thought once a year quite sufficient. You see I was right. (*Cross behind settee* L. C.)

CONSTANTIA. (*majestically*) This is not an occasion for levity.

DICK. My remark was not intentionally humourous.

(*There is a pause during which* CONSTANTIA *shows signs of impatience.* DICK, *quite at his ease, strolls over to fire and warms himself. Presently he takes up framed photograph of* JAMES *which stands conspicuously on mantelpiece.*)

I say, what a beastly picture of old Jim! Don't you think so? (*holds it up*)

CONSTANTIA. (*icily*) It seems to me a satisfactory likeness.

DICK. No, it's so smug and solemn. Poor old chap, I expect he has a pretty boring time of it down here, eh?

CONSTANTIA. (*with elaborate sarcasm*) I have not heard him complain.

DICK. I dare say not. He's a patient sort of chap is old Jim.

(*Shakes his head at photograph as he puts it back on mantelpiece. Then seats himself in arm chair. There is another awkward pause.*)

DICK. By the way, do you still like living in Norwood, Con? *Ghastly* sort of place I used to think it.

CONSTANTIA. It suits me well enough. I like to be near Margaret and James.

DICK. Ah! Do *they* like that?

CONSTANTIA. Certainly.

DICK. Oh! (*a pause*) You're tolerably contented then, take it all together?

(CONSTANTIA *bows.*)

That's right. So am I.

CONSTANTIA. Of course a wife who is separated from her husband can never be very happy.

DICK. No doubt. But a husband who isn't separated from his wife can be tolerably miserable too.

CONSTANTIA. Yes, marriage is a tragedy.

DICK. Just so, with comic relief.

CONSTANTIA. (*impatiently*) Pray be serious.

DICK. My dear Con, I *never* am serious. Why on earth should I be?

CONSTANTIA. Don't you understand that by adopting this frivolous tone you are letting a golden opportunity slip?

DICK. No. Hang me if I do.

CONSTANTIA. (*rising with dignity*) Then no good can come of our continuing this interview.

DICK. (*rising also*) Of course not. What did you expect?

CONSTANTIA. (*exasperated*) I expected that you would at least have seen the propriety of expressing regret for your past conduct and promising amendment in the future.

DICK. What would have been the use of that?

CONSTANTIA. (*bitterly*) Oh, nothing. Nothing that interests you at all, I suppose. Only it might have led to a reconciliation between us.

DICK. (*by fire, raising his eyebrows*) I see. (*deliberately*) I confess that possibility had *not* occurred to me!

CONSTANTIA. (*stiffly*) Indeed!

DICK. (*politely*) Still it's very good of you to suggest it.

CONSTANTIA. (*turning, hotly*) I did *not* suggest it.

DICK. Oh! I thought you did.

CONSTANTIA. (*angrily*) What I said was that had *you* suggested it——

DICK. Yes, yes, of course. What I should have said was it would have been very good of *me* to suggest it. No, that's not right either. Still I appreciate the generosity of your offer.

CONSTANTIA. (*crossly*) I made no offer.

DICK. Dear me, I'm afraid I express myself very clumsily.

CONSTANTIA. (*savagely*) You certainly do. (*sits on settee* C.)

DICK. (*crosses below settee to* R. C. *blandly*) You must put it down to excess of emotion. When a man has been separated from his wife for a year, and there is a suggestion—if that is the right word—that she *might* return to his roof he naturally feels it acutely. The *affection* implied in such a proposal—no, not proposal, hypothesis—is very moving.

CONSTANTIA. I said nothing about affection.

DICK. But it was surely implied?

CONSTANTIA. (*sternly*) No, Richard. Please understand that my—(*pauses for word*)

DICK. (*sweetly*) Mention?

CONSTANTIA.—My mention of a reconciliation was in no way due to affection. Had I returned to you it would have been solely because I considered it my *duty*.

DICK. (*insinuatingly*) Is that *quite* a satisfactory foundation for domestic happiness?

CONSTANTIA. (*impatiently*) I was not thinking of *happiness.*

(*There is a pause.*)

DICK. (*calmly*) Well, Con, I won't ask you to make such a sacrifice.

CONSTANTIA. (*virtuously*) I don't mind sacrificing myself.

DICK. (*quietly*) Ah! *I* do!

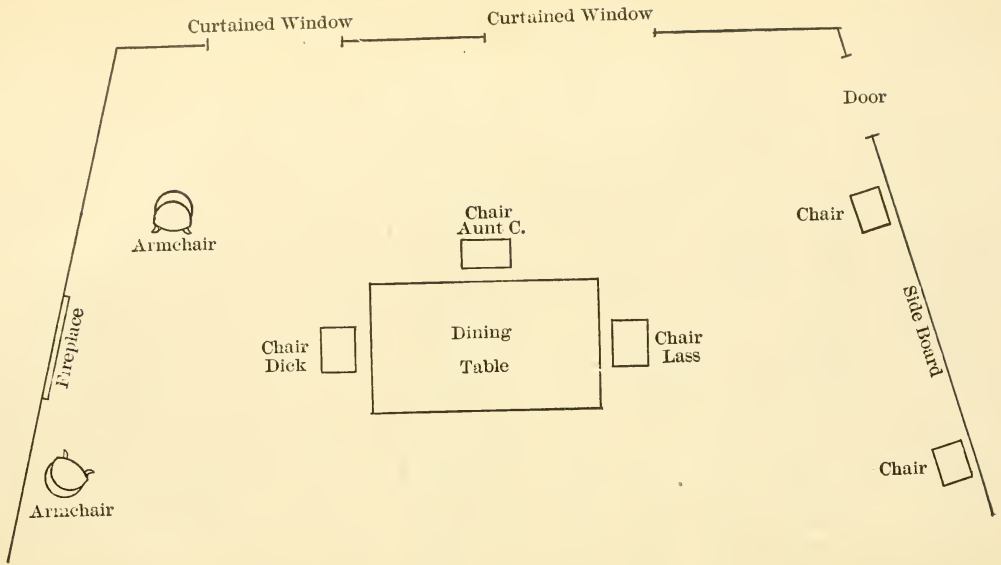
CONSTANTIA. (*rising angrily*) Then there's nothing more to be said.

DICK. (*holding out hand*) Except "goodbye" Con—till next year.

(CONSTANTIA *refuses hand and sweeps out* R. *with dignity.* DICK *stands looking after her with a grim smile. The front door closes sharply.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II


Curtained Window
Curtained Window
Door
Armchair
Chair
Aunt C.
Chair
Chair
Fireplace
Chair
Dick
Dining
Table
Chair
Lass
Side Board
Armchair
Chair

ACT II.

SCENE.—*The Dining-room at the* JAMES WETHERBYS'. *Dinner is half over. At the table in the middle of stage are* AUNT CLARA, *facing audience,* JAMES *at one end,* DICK *at the other. The side of table next the audience is empty. The room is the conventional surburban dining-room, windows curtained behind* AUNT CLARA. *Sideboard behind* DICK L. *Fireplace flanked by two leather easy chairs behind* JAMES R. *Door* L.

(*Pause. The* MAID *hands two sweets.* JAMES, *who looks bored and ill, helps* AUNT CLARA *to jelly.* DICK *helps himself.* JAMES *refuses.*)

DICK. My dear chap, you eat nothing. (*attacks jelly on his plate*) Does he, Aunt Clara?

AUNT CLARA. (*coldly*) James has never a large appetite.

JAMES. I'm not hungry to-night.

DICK. That's bad. (*filling his mouth*) There's nothing like *eating!* It helps a man through life wonderfully.

JAMES. No doubt.

DICK. In fact it's very morbid not to eat. It's not at all a thing to give way to. (*To* MAID) Bring me some more of that. (*Helps himself*)

JAMES. My dear Dick, what nonsense you talk.

DICK. I dare say. If *you* talked more nonsense you wouldn't look so beastly seedy. Eh, Aunt Clara? (*attacks food*)

AUNT CLARA (*coldly*) I had not noticed that James was looking unwell.

DICK. He does though. And he looks beastly *serious* too. That's bad. A man should never be serious at meals. Indeed I'm not sure he should ever be serious at all.

(MAID *takes* JAMES'S *and* AUNT CLARA'S *sweet plates and puts two cheese plates.*)

AUNT CLARA. Really Richard! Considering the solemn cause which brought you here to-day—

DICK. Yes, Constantia *is* solemn, isn't she? That's why we didn't get on.

(MAID *changes plates, etc., during this scene, afterwards hands biscuits and cheese.*)

AUNT CLARA. (*severely*) It is a pity you are not more like her.

(MAID *gives* DICK *cheese plate.*)

DICK. That's what I never can understand about you solemn people. You're all propagandists. You're not only as solemn as owls yourselves—you want everybody else to be solemn too.

JAMES. Oh come, *you* were preaching the virtue of talking nonsense just now.

DICK. So I was. But only to you, Jim.

(*Takes cheese, which the other two refuse.*)

You see I *like* you. But Aunt Clara doesn't like me. (*to* AUNT CLARA) Oh, no you don't. So why on earth she should want to convert me to anything I don't know. (*eats his cheese and biscuit*)

AUNT CLARA. I do not expect *you* to appreciate my motives.

(DICK *grins.*)

JAMES. Aunt Clara means that you aren't an altruist, Dick.

(MAID *removes plates, brushes cloth and puts on dessert during this scene, then Exit.*)

DICK. No, I'm not. But I've got a good temper and a rattling good digestion. That's enough for *me.*

JAMES. Is this the way you used to talk to Constantia?

DICK. Yes.

JAMES. Then I don't wonder she left you.

(DICK *laughs.*)

AUNT CLARA. (*rising*) I cannot be a witness to any more of this levity.

DICK. (*genially*) Don't go, Aunt Clara. Stay till after dessert.

AUNT CLARA. No, I will not—I never eat dessert at night. James, give me your arm.

(JAMES *and* DICK *both rise.* DICK *opens door.* JAMES *helps* AUNT CLARA *out by door* L. *When he returns* DICK *is back in his chair, cracking nuts and pouring himself out a glass of port.*)

JAMES. What a brute you are, Dick! You've made Aunt Clara furious.

DICK. Very sorry, my dear chap. I did my best to amuse her.

JAMES. (*grimly*) Well, you didn't succeed. She's gone straight to bed in a tearing rage.

DICK. Fiery old lady! Nuts, Jim?

JAMES. No, thanks.

DICK. (*taking some more, then looking at* JAMES *keenly but kindly*) My dear old man, what's the matter? You really do look awfully pulled down.

JAMES. Nothing. We were rather late last night. Perhaps it's that.

DICK. (*laughing softly to himself*) Yes. How did you account for the fact *here?*

JAMES. (*with a wry face*) As usual—Missionary Meeting—I nearly got found out, by the way.

DICK. How was that?

JAMES. That fool Robert. He was there too. It wasn't a crowded house apparently, and he can't make out how he didn't spot me.

(DICK *laughs more.*)

That's right! (*with a snarl*) *Laugh* away! I suppose it *is* funny—to you.

DICK. I should think it was.

JAMES. It isn't to *me.* It makes me *sick.*

Fancy a man of my age who has to pretend to his wife that he's been to a cursed missionary meeting because he can't tell her he was amusing himself at your club playing cards.

DICK. Why didn't you tell her?

JAMES. (*crossly*) How can I? She'd never forgive me. Margaret's a dear little girl and she's awfully fond of me, but she's tremendously strict in her ideas. Besides I've got such a confoundedly high character to live up to. If I were just an ordinary person, I dare say she wouldn't be so much shocked. Margaret's not a fool. But she's got it into her head that I'm a sort of saint, and to please her, I've got into the habit of pretending to be one, and now I can't give it up. Was there ever such a beastly tangle!

DICK. Why not make a clean breast of it?

JAMES. I can't, I tell you. It would be bad enough merely to have to tell her that I'm not the good young man they all think me down here. But I should have to own that I'd been deceiving her almost ever since our marriage. She'd never be able to respect me again, and I should never be able to respect myself. (*bitterly*) Indeed, I can't do that *now*.

DICK. My dear chap, you take the whole thing too seriously.

(*Door opens—enter* MAID.)

JAMES. Hush! here's coffee.

(*Coffee is handed—exit* MAID.)

DICK. (*reflectively*) It must be a curious

thing being so highly thought of—especially by one's wife!

JAMES. (*crossly*) Well, you needn't *sneer* at it.

DICK. I wasn't. Still it seems odd—to me. What did they think of your asking me down here?

JAMES. Aunt Clara was rather shocked. But she puts it all down to my high principles.

DICK. How does she manage that?

JAMES. I'm supposed to be such a thoroughly saintly character that I can't judge anyone harshly. Even a beast like you.

DICK. Ho! Ho!

JAMES. Yes. That's *one* advantage in having a good reputation. Whatever you do, people always attribute it to the loftiest motives. If you ask a fellow who's a bad lot to dinner, it's supposed to be because you've such a forgiving disposition. *You* can't say that!

DICK. I don't want to, my dear fellow. And after all, a bad reputation and a good reputation amount to pretty much the same thing in the end.

JAMES. (*disgusted*) I'm hanged if they do.

DICK. Oh yes. *You* can dine with whom you please because you've such a high character. *I* can dine with whom *I* please because I've no character at all. My position is every bit as good as yours. Indeed, I prefer it. (*takes cigar and pushes case across to* JAMES)

JAMES. (*shocked*) Ah, you've no conscience.

DICK. No. Have you a match?

JAMES. Here you are. (*gets match-box from mantelpiece*)

DICK. Won't you smoke?

JAMES. No. Margaret doesn't like it.

DICK. Poor chap! (*lights cigar*) By the way, don't you find the high moral game rather fatiguing?

JAMES. (*sighing*) Sometimes.

DICK. I thought so. That's why you're looking so fagged.

JAMES. (*complainingly*) And yet I'm not naturally a hypocrite. I'd like to be as straightforward as the day. But circumstances were against me. When I fell in love with Margaret, I really did give up all the old bachelor ways. She was so good, (*enthusiastically*) so wonderfully good and sweet, and I determined I'd be like her. For a time, I *was* like her. It was uphill work, but I was.

(DICK *grins.*)

What are you *grinning* at?

DICK. Nothing. Go on.

JAMES. Of course she thought me a perfect saint. I *was* a perfect saint, in fact. And so we were married and came to live down here. And after a time—six months or so—I found I couldn't keep it up. I wanted amusement. But by that time I was saddled with my ghastly reputation. And I've been groaning under it ever since.

DICK. Much better have told her.

JAMES. (*irritably, fidgeting with cigar case*

which remains on table all through scene) I couldn't. Margaret believed in me; so did they all. I couldn't undeceive them. It would have been simply brutal.

DICK. So you took to hypocrisy.

JAMES. (*savagely*) Oh well, you needn't get *virtuous* over it.

DICK. (*calmly*) Not at all, my dear chap.

JAMES. (*grumbling*) It isn't as if I'd been anything very bad. I'm not a vicious man. I only wanted to amuse myself, Music Halls, an occasional race meeting, a game of cards at the club. If she'd only thought me just an ordinary sort of chap, I'd have told her fast enough. But with *my* character! Good Lord!

DICK. You'd much better have adopted *my* system. (*rises, cross* R.)

JAMES. (*snappishly*) *Your* system!

DICK. You needn't sniff at it. It's a lot better than yours.

JAMES. What *is* your system?

DICK. (*getting up from table*) It's very simple. And it's based upon the easiest of all the virtues—Truth!

JAMES. Pshaw!

DICK. Oh, yes it is. (*goes over to fire, selects armchair and seats himself lazily*) I hate pretending things. It's such a *fag*. So I've gone in for perfect frankness. In fact, I may say I've carried frankness to a fine art.

JAMES. What rot!

DICK. 'Tisn't rot at all, my dear chap, and so you'd have found if you'd tried it. Truth's a

splendid thing in married life. It keeps a home together wonderfully.

JAMES. (*sarcastically*) You seem to have found it so!

DICK. (*easily*) Oh, it sometimes breaks one up too. But it's awfully useful either way.

JAMES. I'm glad you think so.

DICK. You see in marriage what one has to aim at is a quiet life. *You* tried to get it by pretending to be as good as Margaret thought you. *That* wasn't very successful. I tried to get it by never pretending anything at all. The result has exceeded my most sanguine expectations.

JAMES. (*ironically*) You're easily satisfied.

DICK. That's my beautiful nature! After I married Constantia, I found she hadn't the same *ideals* as I had, not the same *ideals* at all.

JAMES. *Your* ideals!

DICK. Come, my dear chap, *your* ideals haven't shown up particularly well. As I was saying, Con and I wanted different things. She liked regular hours, church on Sunday, afternoon tea parties, bazaars, that ass Robert and his subscription lists, Aunt Clara and her crochet—by the way, how do *you* like Aunt Clara?

JAMES. Hang Aunt Clara! (*rises irritably and begins to put away decanters, etc., in a restless manner into sideboard* L.)

DICK. (*blandly*) That's exactly what *I* said. Well, I soon realised that either Constantia's view of life must prevail or mine. I rebelled, late hours, golf on Sundays, no tea parties, no bazaars, no Robert, no Aunt Clara. Before long

I had established a reputation as a complete libertine and was allowed to do as I pleased.

JAMES. I remember. Your conduct was disgraceful.

DICK. Not at all, my dear fellow. I never did anything bad. I'm no more vicious than you are. My bad reputation is as hollow as your good one. We're both frauds together.

JAMES. (*impatiently*) Anyhow Constantia believed you were vicious.

DICK. Yes. That was part of my system. In this world, Jim, if you aren't always going about saying you're very good, people end by believing you're very bad. That was what happened to me with Constantia.

JAMES. (*crosses to* R. *of table, leaning against chair*) You deceived her then.

DICK. No, Constantia deceived herself. (*airily*) I took no interest at all in the matter.

JAMES. (*scornfully*) Well, the result was a pretty abject fiasco.

DICK. Fiasco! Why it was a triumph! Constantia sulked for six months and then announced her intention of leaving me. For once my perfect candour deserted me. I feigned distress. But it would scarcely have been decent to do otherwise, eh?

(JAMES *makes inarticulate murmur of reprobation.*)

So one auspicious day the lawyers were called in, an amicable separation was arranged, the parties

to meet once a year. And that's what brought me here to-day.

JAMES. (*indignantly*) I think it's perfectly shameful.

DICK. (*laughing*) Oh, come, look after the beam in your own eye, old man, and leave me my little mote.

JAMES. (*disgusted*) Don't joke about it. You're always joking.

DICK. That's why I keep so jolly well. (*rises, pushes* JAMES)

(JAMES *begins to laugh, finally bursts into a roar.*)

That's right, laugh away, old man, and thank Heaven this deadly lively place hasn't robbed you of the faculty. (*walks to* L. *of table*)

(*From this point to end of scene* JAMES *grows increasingly cheerful and his gloom quite disappears. He goes over to fireplace and takes other armchair*)

JAMES. (*crosses and sitting below fireplace*) But don't you feel any remorse? Think of Constantia. You've ruined her life.

DICK. Not a bit of it. I know Constantia. She's as happy as possible. She doesn't know it, but she is. She's a good woman and she's got a grievance. What more can she want?

JAMES. Still you made her life miserable while you *were* together.

DICK. Well, she made *my* life miserable too—at least she did her best. We're quits.

JAMES. Quits! Ha, ha! I remember that's

what I said to Maggie. Do you know, Dick, I hoped you two might patch things up this afternoon and live together again?

DICK. No, thank you. I've no ill feeling towards Con. I even like her in a way. But I'm not going to live with her. Con is one of those characters who are much more admirable when you aren't married to them. (*crosses back to armchair above fireplace and sits*)

JAMES. You're quite happy as you are?

DICK. Quite! I sleep well, eat well—you don't, Jim—I make no pretence of being better than I am. Rather the contrary. And I find the world a very pleasant amusing place.

JAMES. I wonder how you two ever came to marry?

DICK. (*shrugging shoulders*) Lunacy, I suppose! We haven't a taste in common. Constantia has no sense of humour. *She* likes solemn asses like Robert. *I* don't. By the way, I suppose *you* see a good deal of Robert?

(JAMES *nods laughing.*)

I thought so. And Aunt Clara?

JAMES. She lives with us.

DICK. Poor chap! Now, Jim, can you seriously imagine *my* having Aunt Clara to live with *me?* And Robert dropping in every day?

JAMES. I don't think I can.

DICK. Why don't you turn them out?

JAMES. My character!

DICK. Oh, it's *that* again, is it?

JAMES. I'm supposed to be so awfully kind

and considerate and all that. That's the worst of it. If I were only a brute like you!

DICK. (*triumphantly*) *Now* you begin to see the point of having *no* character. Try it, old man. Try it in your bath, as the advertisements say.

JAMES. (*ruefully*) I can't. I've Margaret to think of.

DICK. She'd get over it—if she's really fond of you.

JAMES. I daren't face the risk.

DICK. You'd better.

JAMES. (*peevishly*) I *can't,* I tell you. No, I've got to go on in the old way with Aunt Clara permanently on the premises, Robert dropping in to collect subscriptions and Constantia living next door but one. And I've a reputation for amiability.

DICK. Poor old chap!

JAMES. 'Tisn't a pretty picture, is it?

DICK. (*jumping up*) Look here, Jim, you want rousing. You're simply perishing of dulness. Hang billiards. Let's run up to town for an hour, go to the Empire and amuse ourselves. We can be back by twelve!

(JAMES *shakes his head.*)

Half-past eleven then. Come along. (*pulls him up out of chair*) Why shouldn't we? It'll do you a world of good.

JAMES. (*wavering*) If Margaret heard of it——

DICK. She won't. After all, 'tisn't the first

little jaunt you've had with me, without anybody being the wiser. You'll come? (*pulls him out of chair by his arm*)

JAMES. (*rising half unwillingly*) I'm sure I oughtn't——

DICK. Bosh, old man! Come along. I'll look after you. How do the trains go from this confounded place?

JAMES. Pretty often. (*looks at watch*) We shall catch one now if we hurry. (*moves up* R.)

DICK. (*dashing out for hats and coats and returning immediately*) Here, get into this. (*flings him overcoat*) Hurry up. (*puts on his own*)

JAMES. Well, just for an hour. I think I do need shaking up. I feel regularly depressed and out of sorts.

DICK. (*dashing to table and pocketing his cigar case*) *Boredom,* my dear fellow. Strong men have died of it!

(*Takes his arm and hurries him out* L. *as Curtain falls.*)

(*The Curtain descends for a moment. When it rises again the stage is dark. The scene is the same. Time three hours later. The sound of a latch-key is heard in front door. Then footsteps in hall—then dining-room door opens letting in shaft of light from hall. Enter* MARGARET *and* ROBERT. MARGERET, *turns up electric light, showing dining-room with cloth cleared and biscuits, syphon and glasses on table and whisky decanter on sideboard.*)

MARGARET. (*up* L.) They're not back yet. At least, I don't see Jim's hat and coat.

ROBERT. Where have they gone? (*crossing* R.)

MARGARET. To the Club, to play billiards.

ROBERT. (*gloomily*) They'll be late then. (*puts hat and stick on table*)

MARGARET. I think not.

ROBERT. You don't know Richard! (*crosses* R. *to fireplace*)

MARGARET. (*comes down* L.) Jim will bring him back in good time.

ROBERT. I wonder if it was wise leaving them together? The influence of a thoroughly depraved nature like Richard's is very insidious.

MARGARET. Oh, with Jim's high character——

ROBERT. Of course—Still there's always a risk.

MARGARET. (*with conviction*) Not with Jim. (*sits* L. *of table*)

ROBERT. (*goes to table and takes three or four biscuits which he eats till end of scene by fireplace*) It was curious that I did not see James at the Otaheite Meeting last night.

MARGARET. It's so easy to miss people.

ROBERT. Yes. Still there weren't many there. (*pause*) Did you see Constantia after her interview to-day?

MARGARET. No.

ROBERT. Then there has not been a reconciliation?

MARGARET. I have heard of none.

ROBERT. I am glad of that. From what she said this afternoon, I was afraid Constantia was

inclined to forget the past and return to Richard. It must have been a mere momentary weakness.

MARGARET. You don't think we should desire a reconciliation?

ROBERT. My dear Margaret, how *could* we? With *our* principles! Richard is a libertine. That Constantia should so far forget her duty to morality as to forgive him would be deplorable. Think of the example to other men. If a man who treats his wife as Richard did is not to be punished, there would be an end of married happiness altogether.

MARGARET. They have been parted for a year. Is not that sufficient punishment?

ROBERT. (*severely*) Not in my opinion. However deep Richard's repentance, it is too soon to forgive him.

MARGARET. James thinks otherwise.

ROBERT. (*sternly*) James is too good-natured. Too good-natured altogether. He is almost lax—yes, lax is the word—he is not severe enough with his brother. Aunt Clara thinks so too. After the separation, he should have set his face against all further relations with him.

MARGARET. But they're in business together.

ROBERT. Except business relations, of course. But to ask him down to stay under his roof! It was weak, Margaret—I am not sure it was not wicked. (*virtuously*) Certainly, it is not a thing *I* shall ever do.

MARGARET. I suppose not. Indeed I hardly think Richard would come.

ROBERT. He knows my *principles* too well.

(*Sound of key in front door is heard again. Door slam. Then voices*)

MARGARET. There they are. (*rises*)

ROBERT. (*crossing to table and taking up hat and stick*) Then I think I'll be going. I do not wish to see more of Richard than I can help. One must not touch pitch!

MARGARET. (*going up to door and opening it*) Is that you, Jim?

(JAMES *enters with* DICK—*both have hats and coats*)

JAMES. (*entering*) Yes, dear. (*kisses her*) Hullo, Robert, just off?

ROBERT. Yes. It's rather late. Good night.

(*Exit* L.)

DICK. Now I call that very considerate of Robert. (*crosses to fireplace, putting coat on table*)

MARGARET. (*coming down* L. C.) (*to* JAMES) Enjoyed your billiards, dear?

JAMES. (*coming down* L.) Thanks, yes, very much. (*throws his overcoat on to* DICK'S *on table*)

MARGARET. Who was at the Club? Anyone I know?

JAMES. (*turning away to sideboard*) No, I think not. It was rather empty—in fact we saw no one.

MARGARET. (C.) How strange! I wonder why that was?

JAMES. (*diving into sideboard for whiskey—slightly confused*) Of course we were only in the *billiard* room. There may have been lots of people in the other rooms. Drink, Dick? (*puts spirits, etc., on table*)

MARGARET. I see. Are you going to sit up, dear?

JAMES. For a little while. Why?

MARGARET. Hadn't you better change your coat?

JAMES. Oh, bother. I can't go all the way upstairs. (*gives* DICK *his drink*)

MARGERET. Give it me, dear. I'm going now, and I'll bring you down an old jacket.

(*He half protests.*)

Oh yes, I will. It's no trouble. (*Helps him off with dress coat*)

JAMES. Angel! (*kisses her.*)

MARGARET. Goose!

(*Exit* MARGARET.)

(JAMES *strolls over to fire.*)

DICK. (*by table watching* JAMES, *taking out cigar and cutting off end*) You're certainly a fluent liar, Jim.

JAMES. Yes. (*ruefully*) I've lots of practice, you see.

DICK. *Your* system, eh? I prefer mine. It's not such a tax on the inventive faculties.

JAMES. (*half bitterly*) Just you wait till you're as fond of any one as I am of Margaret,

and you'll find yourself lying with the best of them.

DICK. Pessimist!

(MARGARET *enters with old jacket,* JAMES *goes up to meet her,* DICK *crosses to and stands by fireplace*)

MARGARET. Here you are, dear. (*helps him into it*) Don't be late.

JAMES. (*kisses her*) Of course not. Good night.

MARGARET. Good night. (*kisses him*) Good night, Richard.

(*Exit with little nod.*)

DICK. (*walks down* L.) I'm afraid dear Margaret hasn't as warm a regard for me as I deserve.

JAMES. (*coming to fireplace*) I should have thought she managed that!

DICK. (*turning*) Bravo! You're quite epigrammatic to-night. Wonderful what a difference an evening's escape from domesticity makes.

JAMES. Sour grapes, my boy. *You* weren't happy at home so you want to pretend no one else is.

DICK. (*crosses, sits* L. *of table* C.) Oh, come, don't pretend you haven't enjoyed yourself to-night. When Kitty Harding was singing "Keep your feet off the grass, dearest," you laughed till I thought you'd have a fit.

JAMES. (*giggling at the recollection*) What a clever little beast she is!

DICK. And that fellow who danced! What was the beggar's name?

JAMES. (*pause while thinking*) I forget. I've got the programme in my coat. (*goes to overcoat on table and feels in pockets*) Where the deuce is it? (*an awful pause, during which a look of terror comes into his face*) Good heavens! I believe it's in the pocket of my dress coat. (*searches frantically*)

DICK. (*comes down* R.—*placidly*) It doesn't matter. We'll look in the morning.

JAMES. But my wife's got it. (*throws coat into armchair down* R.)

DICK. So she has. But she's not likely to ferret in the pockets I suppose.

JAMES. Yes, she *will*. She always folds my things if they're lying about, and *takes everything out of the pockets*.

DICK. (*jumping up and coming to him down* R.) What a way to treat a wife! Run upstairs at once. You may get there before she's found it.

JAMES. (*pale with terror*) But what can I *do?* She'd want to know what I came up for.

DICK. Say you've left your handkerchief in the pocket—invent something as you go upstairs. You're a better liar than I am. Off with you! (*pushes him across to* C. *and goes to fireplace*)

JAMES. I *daren't!* Suppose she's found it already!

DICK. My dear chap, she will if you don't go at once. Pull yourself together.

(JAMES *goes to door, opens it and goes out, returning immediately and coming to armchair up* R.)

JAMES (*in a hollow whisper*) Too late. She's coming downstairs. What on earth's to be done?

DICK. Steady, Jim. She may not have found it.

JAMES. If she has!

DICK. (*calmly*) Then I should make a clean breast of it if I were you?

JAMES. About to-night?

DICK. It would be a trifle late to do that!

JAMES. (*ruefully*) I suppose it would.

DICK. Tell her about everything. Save a lot of trouble in the end. And it'll make things easier for you in the future.

JAMES. I daresay you're right. But I simply haven't the pluck.

DICK. Nonsense. Hush, here she is. Shall I make myself scarce?

JAMES. No. Back me up, for Heaven's sake.

DICK. All right. Courage, old man. (*leans his back against mantelpiece and surveys scene*)

(*Door opens enter* MARGARET—*there is a long silence. She stands up* L. *near the door.*)

(*aside to* JAMES) Better say something.

JAMES. (*in a quavering voice*) Do you want anything, dear?

(*She is still silent, looking at him steadily.*)

What is it, Maggie?

MARGARET. (*programme in hand—sternly*)

Where were you to-night, James, while Robert and I were out?

JAMES. Why do you ask such a question?

MARGARET. Is it such a strange question for a wife to ask?

JAMES. I went up to London with Dick.

MARGARET. Where?

JAMES. To the Empire.

(*There is an awkward pause.*)

(*aside to* DICK) Own up, can't you?

DICK. (*in his calm tone*) It was my suggestion, Margaret. I'm the culprit.

MARGARET. (*to* JAMES) Why did you go?

(*He is silent.*)

DICK. Fact is I thought he needed livening up. A surfeit of missionary meetings——

MARGARET. (*icily*) I was speaking to my husband. (*turning again to* JAMES) Why did you tell me you went to the Club?

JAMES. We *did mean* to go there.

MARGARET. But you didn't go? You've not been there at all?

JAMES. No.

(MARGARET *makes gesture of repulsion and walks down* L.)

DICK. My dear Margaret, don't fret about *us!* The Empire's a very moral place, far more respectable than most clubs.

MARGARET. I hardly consider *you* a judge of morality, Richard. (*to* JAMES) Why did you tell me what was not true?

JAMES. I don't know—I suppose because it would have displeased you.

MARGARET. (*bitterly*) You were very considerate!

JAMES. (*stung by her tone—coming down* R. *to* R C.) Look here, Maggie, there's no use making a fuss about it. It was just a piece of folly, that's all.

MARGARET. Folly! To tell your wife a falsehood!

JAMES. (*crossly*) Oh well, there's nothing so startlingly original about *that.*

MARGARET. I didn't expect to hear a speech of that kind from *you,* James! With *your* high character——

JAMES. Confound my character!

MARGARET (*astonished*) An evening in Richard's company seems to have produced its effect. Or is that remark the result of your entertainment at a music hall?

(JAMES *is silent.*)

DICK. (*airily*) Oh, *I'm* the guilty party. The entertainment was irreproachable.

MARGARET. If you would kindly not interrupt, Richard.

(DICK *shrugs his shoulders.*)

Well, James, have you anything to say to me?

JAMES. Only that I'm sorry, Maggie. I am really.

MARGARET. Is *that* all?

JAMES. (R. C., *goaded*) What do you want me to say? I can't do more than apologise, can I?

The thing's done now. Come, Maggie, shake hands and say you forgive me. (*goes* C. *towards her holding out hand*)

MARGARET. (L. C., *refusing hand*) No, James, I shall *not* forgive you.

(JAMES *falls back.*)

You have deceived me deliberately.

DICK. (*shocked*) No! No! (*moves to* R. C.)

MARGARET. Yes, deliberately, You are not what I thought you, and I will *never* forgive you. (*turns to go, walking up* L.)

JAMES. (*alarmed*) Maggie!

MARGARET. (*coldly, turning at door*) Have you anything more to say?

DICK. (*by* JAMES C., *to him aside*) Now's your time. Make a clean breast of it. You'll be glad of it afterwards.

JAMES. (*pulling himself together—speaking sharply*) Stop, Margaret!

(*She turns again.*)

I *have* something more to say.

(*She comes down* L. *again.*)

DICK. (*softly—aside*) Bravo, Jim! (*back to fire*)

JAMES. (C.) Maggie, I've been wanting to tell you this for a long time—(*hesitates*)

MARGARET. Go on.

(*During this scene* MARGARET *gets colder and more angry;* JAMES *gets more self-possessed.*)

JAMES. Maggie, I'm—(*hesitates*)—I'm not

what you think me—I'm different—very different. (*stops*)

MARGARET. What do you mean?

JAMES. You think I'm an awfully good sort of chap, who doesn't care about amusement like other men. You think I'm only happy when I'm attending missionary meetings and reading to Aunt Clara. You're mistaken.

MARGARET. (*sternly*) So you weren't at the Otaheite Meeting!

JAMES. No, nor the Tobago Diocesan Conference last week, nor the Hairy Ainos Protection Society, nor the Nova Zembla Mission, nor any of them. I don't like missions, they bore me.

MARGARET. (*horrified*) James!

JAMES. Oh yes, they do. You don't know it, but they do. I've gone on pretending for months that I liked them—and other things—just to please you. I've read Aunt Clara her newspaper and given Robert his subscriptions and generally made my life a burden because you liked it. I've done it long enough. I'm going to turn over a new leaf.

MARGARET. (*icily*) And all the time that you were pretending to go to these meetings, you were "amusing" yourself at low music halls, I suppose.

DICK. Not *low* music halls.

MARGARET. Bah! How you have fooled me!

JAMES. (*complacently*) Yes, I'm afraid I've not been quite straightforward. But I'm going to reform from to-night.

MARGARET. How long has this been going on?

JAMES. I don't know. A year—eighteen months.

MARGARET. (*bitterly*) And we have only been married two years.

JAMES. (*almost genially*) It was partly your fault, you know. You *would* put me on a sort of pedestal. Of course I tumbled off. You ought to have expected it. You see your standard was too high for me. I tried to live up to it at first, honestly, I did, but it wasn't a success; I wasn't strong enough. But I think *you* ought to share the blame.

MARGARET. Men always throw the blame on women.

JAMES. Only when they deserve it, Maggie. So you see, there's nothing to be angry about. It's just a case of faults on both sides. Shake hands, dear, and give me a kiss. (*advances towards her*)

MARGARET. (*draws back a pace or two up stage—putting hands behind her back*) *No,* James, I will *not* shake hands. You have fooled me and cheated me. Our whole married life has been a sham.

JAMES. No, no, Maggie. (*goes down* L.)

MARGARET. (*above him—fiercely*) Yes, a cheat and a sham! (*stamps her foot*) Oh, how I despise you! How I despise myself for having been deceived by you! Did you ever love me at all, I wonder. (*half crying—walking to* C.)

JAMES. You know I did, dear.

MARGARET. (*turning* C., *angrily*) I know

nothing. You deceived me in everything else. Why not in that?

JAMES. Never mind, Maggie. Make it up and we'll start afresh to-morrow. Forget about all this; it's past, and I swear I'll always be open with you for the future. I will, really.

MARGARET. The future! (*coldly*) You don't suppose I can *live* with you again after this.

(DICK *raises eyebrows.*)

I should despise myself if I even thought of such a thing.

JAMES. (*horrified*) Maggie!

MARGARET. No, James, I shall leave this house to-morrow. I am no longer your wife.

JAMES. (*alarmed*) You can't. You have no right.

MARGARET. Not legally, perhaps. Morally I should do wrong to remain with you.

JAMES. I shall not allow you to go.

MARGARET. How will you prevent me? Constantia left Richard for less.

JAMES. (*growing more alarmed*) Maggie, think! You're angry with me now. It is natural that you should be. But don't punish me too much. Don't leave me. Give me another chance.

MARGARET. And be deceived again? *No, James!* Indeed I don't think it would be right to forgive you. Men who behave as you have done deserve to suffer.

JAMES. (*sadly*) I didn't expect you would cast me off so readily, Maggie.

MARGARET. You are unjust. You know how

I hate to do it. But I *must.* (*almost breaking down*) Oh, Jim, Jim, *why* did you tell me all this? Why didn't you leave me in ignorance?

JAMES. (*gently*) You found me out, dear.

MARGARET. Only about to-night. I could have forgiven you to-night. It's all these months of deception that I *can't* forget.

JAMES. You will.

MARGARET. (*bursting into tears*) No. If it was only to-night it would be different, but now that I know your whole life has been a lie, I cannot live with you any longer. (*with a gulp*) Good-bye, James. (*solemnly she walks up* L. C.)

JAMES. (*startled*) Where are you going?

MARGARET. (*through her tears*) To b-b-bed. I shall leave this house to-morrow after breakfast.

(*Exit in a burst of emotion.*)

(*There is a pause during which* DICK *looks half-humourously at* JAMES, *who goes half way up to door as if to follow, and then turns, walking down* L. C. *He looks unutterably depressed.*)

DICK. Curious how much alike sisters are.

JAMES. (*brusquely*) What do you mean?

DICK. I remember an almost similar scene a year ago with Constantia. The marriage tie seems to sit loosely on our family.

JAMES. (*snappishly*) I shall be glad if you won't jest about it.

DICK. (*coming* R. C.) Steady, old man.

Don't quarrel with your brother as well as your wife in one evening.

JAMES. (*coming* C., *penitent*) I beg your pardon. I'm knocked out of time by all this. (*angrily*) But I won't have you sneering at Margaret. She's a saint.

DICK My dear Jim, to say that a lady resembles one's wife isn't usually described as sneering.

JAMES. (*impatiently*) Oh, you know what I mean.

DICK. (C., *putting his hand on* JAMES'S *shoulder*) Poor old boy, you *do* take it bad!

(JAMES *puts his head on his hands and his shoulders heave with sobs.*)

I say, don't do that for Heaven's sake. Easy, Jim, easy. She won't go, you know.

JAMES. (*turning away* L.) She will, I'm sure she will. You don't know Margaret.

DICK. And if she does, there are worse things than being a bachelor again!

JAMES. (*laughing in spite of himself*) That's right—make a joke about it.

DICK. My remark was perfectly serious. (*goes to* R. *of table.*)

JAMES. (*turning again and coming to* L. *of table*) And the deuce of it all is if I hadn't taken *your* advice and blurted out the whole story like a fool, she would have forgiven me.

JAMES. (*grimly*) So she *said.* (*pours himself out another drink*)

JAMES. And she would too. (*crossly*) I'll trouble you not to question it.

(DICK *shrugs his shoulders.*)

This comes of your cursed policy of candour. After this I'll never speak the truth again as long as I live. Never!

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*The drawing-room at the* JAMES WETHERBYS.' *The French windows on to garden are open. The sun shines brilliantly.*

(*Enter* JAMES *and* DICK, *the former looking wretchedly depressed. He goes to fire shivering, and warms hands.*)

DICK. (*strolling up to open window and looking out*) Jove, what a glorious morning!

JAMES. Is it? I hadn't noticed. (L.)

DICK. You didn't eat any breakfast. How the deuce is a fellow to notice anything on an empty stomach?

JAMES. I wasn't hungry.

DICK. Ah. *I* was. (*turning to him and noticing his depression. Then going to him more sympathetically*) Fretting, Jim?

JAMES. I suppose so.

DICK. (*affectionately*) What a soft-hearted beggar it is. Cheer up.

JAMES. (*savagely*) One would think being about to be separated from one's wife was an every-day occurrence to hear you talk! (*crosses to* C.)

DICK. (*humouring him*) No, no, not quite that. But will she go? That's the question. (L. C.)

JAMES. You heard what she said last night.

DICK. (*easily*) Oh, I don't attach much importance to *that!*

JAMES. (R. C., *bitterly*) I'm afraid I can't share your confidence.

DICK. Not seen her to-day?

JAMES. No. She wasn't at breakfast, as you saw.

DICK. (*horrified*) Has *she* had no breakfast either?

JAMES. I don't know.

DICK. (*holding up his hands*) What a household! Aunt Clara, too? *She* wasn't down. I assume she also is fasting?

JAMES. She always has breakfast in her room.

DICK (*cheerfully*) I congratulate you. *Robert,* I suppose you're never safe from?

SERVANT. (*announcing*) Mr. Robert Carne!

DICK. (*sitting in armchair—sardonically*) Ah, I thought so!

(*Enter* ROBERT.)

JAMES. (*crosses* R., *sulkily*) Good morning.

ROBERT. Good morning, James. I thought I should find Margaret here.

JAMES. She's not come down yet.

ROBERT. Ah. I'll wait. (*sits on ottoman*)

JAMES. She won't be down for some time. Perhaps you'd better come in later.

ROBERT. I've nothing special to do.

(JAMES *makes gesture of despair at* ROBERT'S *obtuseness behind* ROBERT'S *back. There is a pause. Then he turns back to* ROBERT *and speaks, hesitating between each lie and obviously taxing his powers of invention.*)

JAMES. She may not be here for an hour. She has a headache. I advise you to go out for a stroll. She may be a long time yet. (R.)

ROBERT. (C.) Well, perhaps I'd better come back.

(*Exit* R.)

(JAMES *gives a sigh of relief.*)

DICK. (L.) (*looking at* JAMES *curiously*) My dear Jim, do you *never* speak the truth?

JAMES. Eh? No. (*bitterly*) I suppose I've got out of the habit. (*sits* C.)

DICK. (*rises and comes* C.) Why didn't you kick the beggar out instead of inventing all that rot about Margaret?

JAMES. I ought to have done so, I suppose. It would have been more straightforward. But I'm hopelessly demoralised. I can't bear hurting the feelings of anyone, even an ass like Robert.

DICK. What a good chap you are!

JAMES. (*with a bitter laugh*) Good!

(*Enter* MARGARET, *she looks pale as if after a sleepless night. But there is no sign of softening in her face.*)

(*rising and going towards her with outstretched hands*) Good morning, Maggie.

MARGARET. Is that you, James? I thought you would have gone up to business by now. (*ignores hand.*)

JAMES. (*drops hand to his side and turns away*) I'm not going. I telegraphed up this morning. They'll let me know if there's anything important.

MARGARET. I came to collect a few things out of this room, which I should like to take with me.

JAMES. (L.) (*hopelessly*) You are still resolved to go?

MARGARET. Quite, James.

JAMES. Where?

MARGARET. To Constantia in the first instance. I daresay she can find room for me for a time. Afterwards, some arrangement will have to be made between us, I suppose. But the lawyers can see to all that. They did in Constantia's case, did they not? (*she looks towards* DICK *as she says this, but does not address him directly.*)

DICK. (*cheerily*) Oh, yes. *They'll* manage it all right. In an amicable separation of this kind, they're invaluable. You leave it to *them.* (*at back*)

JAMES. (*goes to* MARGARET R. C., *standing a little above her—in low voice*) Is it quite useless to urge you to pause before you do this, Maggie?

MARGARET. Quite useless, James. My mind is made up. (*crosses to* L. C.) Constantia will be here in a few minutes. I have written to her. Perhaps it would be better if you were not here when she arrived—either of you—it would be

painful to everybody. (*including* DICK *in her look, but still not addressing him.*)

DICK. Quite right. Let's go out into the garden, Jim, and give Constantia a fair field. (*goes towards window, where he stands looking grimly towards others.*)

JAMES. I shall see you before you go?

MARGARET. If you wish it.

JAMES. (*breaking out—crossing to her*) Maggie, if you only knew how sorry I am! How ashamed!

MARGARET. (*raising her hand*) Please! If you wish to see me to say good-bye, I am willing, but don't try to change my resolution. You will not succeed.

(*Exeunt* JAMES *and* DICK C.)

(MARGARET, *left alone, takes small tray from piano* R., *and wanders round room collecting various trifles, a small clock in case, a couple of books, a silver scent bottle, etc. She pauses by photograph of* JAMES *on mantle-piece, takes it up, looks at it for some time, half puts it down again, then seems to make up her mind and takes it, adding it to pile on small table up* L. C.)

SERVANT. (*announcing*) Mrs. Richard Wetherby.

(*Enter* CONSTANTIA.)

(*Exit* MAID, R.)

CONSTANTIA. (*fussily—going over to her* L. C.) My *dear* Margaret, what has happened? I came

at once. Are you in trouble of any kind? Your note explained nothing.

MARGARET. I thought I would rather tell you myself. I have discovered that James has been deceiving me, and I am leaving him. Can you take me in for a few days?

CONSTANTIA. (*astonished*) Of course, dear, with pleasure—that is, I mean, are you really obliged to take this step?

MARGARET. I *am* obliged to do so. No other course is open to me.

CONSTANTIA. But, my dear, this is very sudden. James, too! So high principled as he always appeared! Are you sure there has been no mistake?

MARGARET. He has admitted everything.

CONSTANTIA. How extraordinary! I never should have thought that of James! But there —you never know *men!* (*sits* C.) When do you think of coming to me?

MARGARET. To-day, if you can have me. I am merely putting a few things together to take with me. (*adding something to the pile on small table* L. C.)

CONSTANTIA. Quite right, dear. You can't be too careful about *that.* I left such a *lot* of things behind me, when I left Richard, that I wanted afterwards! Plate, for instance, and knives! I took not a single spoon or fork, and the same with table linen.

MARGARET. (*crosses at back, sits* R.) I was not thinking of those things. I shall only take a few personal belongings, nothing of value.

CONSTANTIA. Is that *wise,* dear? Of course James must make you a suitable allowance. My own from Richard was *most* meagre! And even a small establishment costs so much to start. The merest necessaries are so expensive. And they wear out in no time nowadays.

MARGARET. (*listlessly*) I dare say.

CONSTANTIA. But tell me, dear, when did you find out this about James?

MARGARET. Last night. It seems that for months he and Richard have been spending most of their evenings in low dissipation.

CONSTANTIA. Richard was the tempter, of course?

MARGARET. (*listlessly*) I suppose so.

CONSTANTIA. (*rising energetically*) Margaret there must be an end of this. Richard must not be allowed to exercise his malign influence unfettered. My mind is made up. I shall put a stop to it!

MARGARET. How will you do that?

CONSTANTIA. (*decidedly*) By returning to his roof! As long as he is living as a bachelor there is no check on his depravities. But when *I* am with him I can at least see that he keeps within bounds. (R. C.)

MARGARET. (R.) You will go back to him? You will forgive him?

CONSTANTIA. No. I shall not forgive him. He has not deserved that. But I shall go back to him. I cannot allow him to retain his liberty any longer. When I separated from him it was to punish his misconduct and give him an oppor-

tunity for repentance, not to enable him to plunge deeper into vice and folly. (*crosses to fire.*)

MARGARET. But Constantia! *Ought* you to do this? Won't you be very unhappy? (*rises*)

CONSTANTIA. (*calmly*) I shall be able to bear it. Indeed, I have not found my life apart from Richard so happy either. The house is very small and the dining-room chimney smokes. (*sits at desk*) Of course these things do not *weigh* with me, but they exist. And you must remember that it was *duty* which made me leave my husband, not pleasure. The lot of a woman living apart from her husband has great inconveniences. It may be right that she should do it, it may be *right* that *you* should, dear, but it is not *pleasant!*

MARGARET. (*sits on ottoman—bitterly*) The life of a woman who lives with a husband she no longer loves is not pleasant either.

CONSTANTIA. No doubt. (*in a practical tone*) Still, of the two, I think I prefer it. (*pause*) And in any case we can only take the course which we believe to be *right. My* duty is clearly to return to Richard and to watch over him more carefully in future.

MARGARET. Then you will not be able to take me in for a few days?

CONSTANTIA. No, dear. I shall be going back to town with Richard this afternoon. But you can have my house for the present with pleasure. Houses are always better occupied, aren't they? And I shall probably not be able to let it immediately.

MARGARET. You intend to speak to Richard to-day?

CONSTANTIA. (*briskly*) Yes. At once, if you will kindly send for him.

MARGARET. (*rises*) Very well. (*rings bell*) And now if you don't mind I'll go upstairs and finish my packing.

(*Enter* MAID.)

Will you ask Mr. Richard to come here, Jane? He is in the garden. Take these things upstairs when you have done so. (*points to things on sofa and*

(*Exits* R.)

(MAID *exit* C., *returning a moment later with* DICK.)

(*Then exits* MAID *with tray full of things,* R.)

DICK. (L. C.) Hullo, Constantia! You here? You want to see me?

CONSTANTIA. (L.) Yes, Richard.

DICK. But this isn't in the agreement. The agreement said that we were to meet once a year. I really can't talk to you two days running!

CONSTANTIA. This is not a time for jesting.

DICK. It never is—with you, Constantia!

(*She makes impatient gesture.*)

Well, what do you want to say to me?

CONSTANTIA. Richard, I have heard of your shocking behaviour.

DICK. Not for the first time, I am sure.

CONSTANTIA. It appears, from what Margaret has told me, that you now abuse your liberty as shamelessly as you formerly abused your position as a husband. In the one case you made *my* life wretched. In the other you lead others into temptation.

DICK. Meaning poor old Jim?

CONSTANTIA. I mean your unhappy brother James.

DICK. (*nodding*) I suppose it's the same person.

CONSTANTIA. What I have now to say to you is, that I cannot permit you to be a source of moral contamination to others any longer.

DICK. I see. You're going to keep your eye on me from Norwood? Very sporting of you to warn me beforehand.

CONSTANTIA. No, Richard, I am going to return to you as your wife! (*rises*)

DICK. (*his jaw drops*) Oh no, you're not! (*moves* R.)

CONSTANTIA. I beg your pardon.

DICK. (R. C.) My dear Constantia, pray dismiss this idea from your mind altogether. You will not return to me because I decline to receive you.

CONSTANTIA. (L. C. *astonished*) You refuse?

DICK. (C.) Of course I refuse. You don't love me. You told me that yesterday. And now your only idea in returning to me is to keep an eye on my moral character. You don't suppose I shall *like* that, do you?

CONSTANTIA. (L. C.) (*frigidly*) It was not intended that you should.

DICK. Precisely. So I decline to submit myself to the experiment.

CONSTANTIA. I shall insist upon it. (*loftily*) It is the *duty* of a husband and wife to live together.

DICK. It's taken you some time to find out that! (*slight movement to* R. C.)

CONSTANTIA. (*takes a step after him—after a pause*) Tell me, Richard, what is your reason for this refusal? You must have a reason.

DICK. My dear Constantia, it's simple enough, I no longer love you.

CONSTANTIA. (*starting back to* L. C.) You dare tell me that!

DICK. Why not? You no longer love *me*. You told me so yesterday.

CONSTANTIA. (*walks down* L.) There's some other reason. I'm sure of it. If you no longer care for me it must be because you have met someone else.

DICK. (*sits* C.) My dear, don't be childish.

CONSTANTIA. (*turning*) Oh, you can't put me off in that way. A man doesn't want to live apart from his wife in this discreditable manner unless there is some other woman he loves better.

DICK. What shocking ideas you moral people have.

CONSTANTIA. (*coming and standing over him* C.) If you were not irreclaimably vicious you would welcome this chance of a reconciliation.

DICK. Vicious? Nonsense, I'm not vicious. I'm a very moral person.

CONSTANTIA. Then you deceived me grossly. You always *told* me you were vicious.

DICK. I think not.

CONSTANTIA. Well, when I said so, you never denied it.

DICK. I always used to let you have your own way. That's why you left me. Women like to be tyrannised over.

CONSTANTIA. (*she takes a few paces down* R., *and turns—controlling herself with difficulty*) Will you answer me one question?

DICK. (*blandly*) No. I don't think I will. In fact this whole interview is most irregular. You must keep it for next year.

CONSTANTIA. You're unbearable.

DICK. (*rises, triumphantly*) That's why we're so much better apart. I'm sure you feel that?

CONSTANTIA. (*coming up to him* C., *fiercely*) You won't get rid of me so easily.

DICK. (*sweetly*) Not altogether perhaps. But the relative freedom I at present enjoy suits me well enough.

CONSTANTIA. (*crosses to him* L. C.—*he gets* R. C.) (*Furious*) I'll find a way of punishing you for this!

DICK. (*laughing*) Threats! My dear Con, you shock me. Why should you object? You'll be happy enough. You'll have Margaret with you, you know.

(CONSTANTIA *makes a gesture of rage. She walks down* L.)

As for Jim he will share my flat in Maddox Street. It's big enough for two.

(JAMES *passes window front to* R. DICK *calls out*)

(R. C.) Won't you, Jim?

JAMES. (*coming to window*) What did you say?

DICK. I was telling Constantia you and I were going to settle down together in Maddox Street.

CONSTANTIA. (*crosses to* DICK with gesture *of fury*) Brute!

(*Exit* R., *in a towering passion.*)

DICK. Come in, Jim. I never could resist the temptation to chaff Constantia.

JAMES. (*coming down* L. C., *sarcastically*) I suppose she *liked* that?

DICK. (R. C.) If she did, she concealed the feeling very successfully. But how about you, old man? *You* don't look very bright. Wife not forgiven you yet?

JAMES. No. She's determined to leave me.

DICK. Lucky fellow! *My* wife wants to *return* to *me!* I'm far more to be pitied.

JAMES. (*irritably*) I wish to heaven you'd be serious sometimes.

DICK. Serious? I'm deuced serious. Why, I tell you, my dear chap, if I hadn't been absolutely rude to Constantia, she'd have thrown her-

self into my arms and we should have had to begin married life all over again! I shouldn't have liked *that* at all.

JAMES. Why did she want to go back? It seems an odd taste.

DICK. Taste had nothing to do with it. It was pure conscientiousness on her part. She thinks she ought to look after me.

JAMES. And you refused to take her back?

DICK. (*nods*) Certainly.

JAMES. (*disgusted*) You must be an absolute brute. (*sits* C.)

DICK. Why? She left me of her own choice. I'm not going to be sent about my business and then whistled back again at a moment's notice. What would you say (*crosses to* L. C.) if Margaret told you she'd altered her mind and wasn't going to leave you after all?

JAMES. (*enthusiastically*) Say? Why that she was the dearest, kindest, most forgiving little soul in the world.

DICK. (*horrified*) My dear fellow!

JAMES. Confound you, Dick, can't you understand that I *love* Margaret—that there's nothing on earth I wish so much as to be reconciled to her?

DICK. And go back to the old slavery?

JAMES. It wasn't slavery. It was happiness.

(DICK *gasps.*)

DICK. Well, you certainly have the most curious conception of happiness. But there, go back to your Margaret, if you must!

JAMES. If I only could!

DICK. But don't expect me to take back Constantia, because I shan't.

JAMES. I don't believe you're serious.

DICK. I'm perfectly serious. (*looking at him keenly*) Are you?

JAMES. About Margaret? Of course.

(DICK *shrugs his shoulders.*)

Dash it, man, one would think it was *unusual* for a husband to want to be reconciled to his wife!

DICK. 'Tisn't what you'd call *common!* But there, it's your taste. Send her down to me. Say I've something to say to her.

(JAMES *rises.*)

I daresay I can bring her to reason. (*in an off-hand way.*)

JAMES. She won't come.

DICK. Oh yes, she will—from curiosity.

(*Exit* JAMES R., *disgusted at this parting piece of cynicism.*)

(*While he is away* DICK *strolls about room, examining philistine decorations with every sign of contempt. Notices gap on mantelpiece where* JIM'S *picture used to be. Whistles. Enter* MARGARET. *He turns hurriedly and stands with back to fireplace.*)

MARGARET. You wish to speak to me?

DICK. Yes. Sit down.

MARGARET. (*sits* C., L. *of ottoman*) I should

tell you at once that if your intention is to plead on James's behalf, you are only wasting your time.

DICK. (*airily*) Oh, it isn't. I think Jim's rather well out of it.

MARGARET. (*with frozen dignity*) I beg your pardon?

DICK. It isn't half bad being a bachelor again, at least that's my experience.

MARGARET. James is not of your opinion.

DICK. He will be. Not at first of course, but afterwards, and anyhow he'll get accustomed to it. It's astonishing how quickly men get *used* to things. He'll drop back into the old bachelor ways. No Aunt Clara! (*impressively*) No Robert! Oh, *he'll* be happy enough. You needn't fret about *him!*

MARGARET. It's not true. James is not like that.

DICK. My dear Margaret, men are very much alike. He'll get to enjoy his freedom as I have done.

MARGARET. (*fiercely*) He won't! He won't! You're heartless and selfish. You don't *feel* at all. Jim loves me.

DICK. (*pause—quietly*) I used to love Constantia.

MARGARET. Used to love!

DICK. Yes. (*with obvious sincerity*) People say that love never dies. On the contrary love is killed, oh so easily. A word, a look, moments of temper, inopportune tears. How they kill love!

MARGARET. I don't believe you.

DICK. Oh yes, you do. And besides these, there are other things—boredom, relations—you're not very fortunate in the matter of relations, are you? Little failures of tact and taste, little errors of judgment, all these contain a drop of the poison which may help to kill love!

MARGARET. (*wondering*) Why do you speak to me like this? You are quite serious. I thought you were never serious.

DICK. I'm not often—fortunately.

MARGARET. (*puzzled*) But why now? (*rising angrily*) I see what it is. This is a trap. You want to make me forgive James.

DICK. (*in his most exasperating manner*) My dear Margaret, be sensible. Sit down. Why on earth should *I* want you to forgive Jim? I *like* him!

MARGARET. (*stung*) What do you mean?

DICK. You see if you leave Jim *I* shall see a lot more of him than I do now. As far as I am concerned the more completely you sever your connection with him the better.

MARGARET. (*triumphantly*) But he wouldn't be happy.

DICK. Ah, we don't agree about that.

MARGARET. (*sitting down*) Then why did you send for me? Why have you spoken to me at all? If you would rather I left James why need you do anything but just leave us to part as we *were* doing?

DICK. *Were?* Your resolution is wavering, you see. (*moves slightly towards her*)

MARGARET. (*hotly*) It is *not!*

DICK. (*calmly*) I misunderstand you then. So much the better for me. *I* get Jim instead, you don't!

MARGARET. (*bewildered*) I don't understand. You haven't told me yet why you're trying to bring us together—if you are trying.

DICK. (*dispassionately*) It's a sort of random benevolence on my part. I have fits of it.

MARGARET. (*peevishly*) What *do* you mean?

DICK. The fact is I was talking to poor old Jim a few minutes ago, and he really did seem most awfully fond of you and all that, in spite of the way you've behaved——

MARGARET. (*rising angrily*) *I've* behaved! Thank you, Richard. That will do. I told you it was useless for you to plead on James's behalf. I am now sure of it. (*going up* R.)

DICK. (*laughing*) Come back, Margaret. You misunderstand me. If you would kindly have let me finish my sentence.

MARGARET. Well? (*turns to face him but does not come back.*)

DICK. Let me see, where was I? Oh, I found that Jim was awfully fond of you—absurdly so it seemed to me—and you're awfully fond of him too, you know, though you won't admit it at present.

MARGARET. I don't see that that is any reason why you should have interfered.

DICK. (*impatiently*) My dear Margaret, when I see a woman deliberately throwing away her own happiness, I think it's only kind to warn her. That's all.

MARGARET. *Her* happiness?

DICK. Yes. (*pause*) Jim will get over this all right, as I said. Men do. They're tough. And they've lots of distractions. It's different with women. (*coldly*) So I thought I'd just give you a hint before it was too late.

MARGARET. (*sarcastically*) Isn't it rather late for *you* to begin to consider *me?*

DICK. I dare say. But it's not too late for you to consider yourself.

MARGARET. (*haughtily*) I haven't the least idea what you mean by that.

DICK. Sit down and I'll try to make myself clear.

(*She sits. He sits beside her. Both sit on ottoman.* MARGARET R. DICK L. *of it.*)

MARGARET. Well?

DICK. Do you know what passed between myself and Constantia this morning?

MARGARET. Yes. A reconciliation.

DICK. No. Your sister wished for one. At least she wished to patch up our marriage somehow. I refused.

MARGARET. You refused?

DICK. Yes. (*pause*) I'm happier as I am.

MARGARET. And Constantia? Didn't you think at all of her?

DICK. Constantia made her choice a year ago. She can't alter it now.

MARGARET. And are you never going to live with her again? Never at all?

DICK. (*cheerfully*) *Never!* On that point I am quite clear. (*there is a pause*)

MARGARET. (*slowly*) I still don't see what all this has to do with *me.*

DICK. (*airily*) Merely a parallel case. That's all.

MARGARET. (*in a whisper*) Parallel?

DICK. (*sternly*) Yes. I loved Constantia once. Jim loves you now. Constantia sulked with me, badgered me, bored me, finally left me as you are leaving Jim. Poor woman, she thought she would be happy living alone. At least she thought she would be contented. So do you. She was mistaken. You can see it in her face, the lonely look of the woman who has no home. And we have only been separated a year! Yet she so hates her present life that this morning nothing but my direct refusal to receive her prevented her from returning to me. What a situation! How humiliating and disastrous! Think carefully, Margaret, before you do as she did.

MARGARET. (*half to herself*) What an escape! What an escape!

DICK. You *will* think carefully? Not for Jim's sake, Margaret, *but for your own!*

(MARGARET *bursts into tears.*)

(*rises*) There, there, that's all right, dry your eyes and then go and make it up with Jim.

MARGARET. (*trying to stifle her sobs*) B . . . b . . but will he forgive me? Will he make it up?

DICK. (*grimly*) Oh yes, he'll forgive you all right.

MARGARET. (*rising and drying her eyes*) It's very unjust. Men always have the best of it. *They* do wrong and *we* suffer.

DICK. Ah well, you manage to make it pretty disagreeable for them too sometimes!

MARGARET. (*half crying*) I thought I was doing right. Jim behaved very badly. It was my *duty* to punish him.

DICK. You don't call punishing your husband *duty? I* call it pleasure.

MARGARET. (*laughing through her tears*) You're very horrid! But you meant this kindly. You're not really *bad,* Dick. I see that now.

DICK. (*backs up* L., *alarmed*) For Heaven's sake don't begin putting *me* on a pedestal! It wouldn't suit me at all. (*going to door, opens it and calls*) Jim! Jim! (*to* MARGARET) Come, summon up a smile to greet your husband. Ever such a litle one!

(*She smiles faintly. She crosses* L. *and turns towards him up stage.*)

(*Enter* JIM.)

Jim, go to your wife and tell her you're heartily ashamed of yourself and will never do anything wrong again, and perhaps she'll forgive you. I'll go upstairs and finish packing. I sha'n't be two minutes.

(*Exit* R., *hastily.*)

JAMES. (*coming down* R.) Margaret! Is it true? Will you forgive me this time?

MARGARET. (*to him* C.) Yes, Jim, if you'll

promise never to hide anything from me again. (*Embraces him.*)

JAMES. Angel! Of course I promise. I'll never hide anything from you in future. And I'll never go anywhere with Dick again as long as I live!

MARGARET. Oh no, Jim, you mustn't say that. I've changed my opinion about Dick. I believe he's quite good really, nearly as good as you are, only not so serious. I should like him to come and stay with us. He's fond of you, Jim.

JAMES. What will Aunt Clara say to that?

MARGARET. Aunt Clara will not be here. She must go away; and Robert too. In future we must have our house to ourselves, and live our lives in our own way.

JAMES. (*embracing*) Margaret, you're a trump! But I'll deserve it. I swear I will. I'll do whatever you wish. (*draws her down on sofa beside him.*)

MARGARET. Dear old Jim. (*strokes his hair affectionately*)

(*Enter* DICK *with bag and overcoat.*)

DICK. Hullo, not finished yet?

(MARGARET *moves away from him hastily.*)

JAMES. Confound you, Dick, don't interrupt. (*possesses himself of* MARGARET'S *hand.*)

DICK. Not for worlds. But as my train goes in ten minutes, I thought you might find time to say good-bye to me. (*comes down* R. C.)

JAMES. (*rises and going* R.) You're not going before lunch?

MARGARET. Do stay.

DICK. No. (*getting into coat*) The atmosphere of this place is altogether too connubial. (R. C.) I must get back to my lonely flat in Maddox Street, where no wives are admitted. Good-bye, Maggie. Good bye, Jim. Don't be too *good* either of you! And when you see Constantia, tell her I've

(JAMES *and* MARGARET *go* L. C. *together.*)

decided to remain a grass widower permanently.

(*Turns to go, picking up bag and hat.* MARGARET *and* JAMES *stand hand in hand. As he reaches door* R. *enter* CONSTANTIA *dressed as for journey. In her hand she carries a dressing bag.*)

Hullo, Con, I was just speaking of you. What *is* the use of that confounded agreement if you keep popping up in this way? What are *you* doing here?

CONSTANTIA. I came to find *you*, Richard.

DICK. But this is quite out of order. You were to see me once a year, not twice a day. Besides, I'm just off to London.

CONSTANTIA. I also am going to London.

DICK. By this train?

CONSTANTIA. Yes.

DICK. (*cross* R. C. *to* R.) Very well. You've just time to catch it. (*sits down* R.) I'll take the next.

CONSTANTIA. No, Richard, we shall go together. (*comes down* R. C.)

DICK. What!

CONSTANTIA. I have made up my mind to forgive you. I consider it my duty.

DICK. (*with the calmness of despair*) There seems to be a perfect epidemic of forgiveness down here just now. Here's Margaret who has made it up with Jim, and there they stand holding one another's hands in a manner that's perfectly sickening.

(MARGARET *pulls her hand away guiltily.*)

And now *you* want to forgive *me!* I don't want to be forgiven! I *won't* be forgiven!

CONSTANTIA. (*sternly*) Margaret! Is this true?

MARGARET. Yes, Connie.

CONSTANTIA. Indeed! Well, I only hope you will not live to regret it. You appear to me to have acted with undue precipitation!

JAMES. (L.) We're going to risk it!

CONSTANTIA. (C. *with grunt of disapproval, turning to* DICK) Well, Richard. I am ready.

DICK. (R.) I'm not. I decline to allow you to come with me.

CONSTANTIA. (*firmly*) Nothing but physical violence will prevent me.

DICK. (*rises, reproachfully*) Look here, Con, is this fair? I allowed you to leave me when you wanted to. *You've* no right to change your mind now. It's fickle, that's what I call it. Beastly fickle!

CONSTANTIA. This is not a moment for jesting.

DICK. (*disgusted*) It certainly isn't!

CONSTANTIA. (*sternly*) Then if you will take up your bag, perhaps we had better start.

DICK. I'm dashed if I will. I can't take you to Maddox Street. You'd be awfully uncomfortable there.

CONSTANTIA. I shall do very well. You said there was room for two only this morning.

(DICK *makes a gesture of despair.*)

MARGARET. (L. C.—*coaxingly*) Dick, be *nice* to her. You're not hard-hearted really, though you like to pretend to be. Take her back.

DICK. Look here, Maggie, I call that pretty rough. Is this my reward for reconciling you to your husband?

MARGARET. Well, I'm only trying to reconcile you to your wife.

DICK. (R.) (*disgusted*) Dash it all! Don't joke about it. *One* humourist is enough in any family.

JAMES. Make it up, old man. It isn't half bad being married after all, eh, Maggie? And you can't prevent her from coming unless you call in the police! You only separated by mutual consent.

DICK. (*resigning himself*) Very well. Look here, Con, if you'll say you're sorry for the way you've treated me, and will let me do everything that I please in future and always laugh at my jokes, I'll forgive you. I can't say fairer than that.

MARGARET. Say yes, Connie.

DICK. (*to her more kindly*) Come, Con, do the thing handsomely. Is it yes?

CONSTANTIA. Yes, Richard.

(*They shake hands.*)

CURTAIN.

(*At second curtain* CONSTANTIA *is by door followed by* DICK, *carrying BOTH the bags.*)

THE END.

(*French's Standard Drama Continued from 2d page of Cover.*)

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